

2002

Vincentiana Vol. 46, No. 3 [Full Issue]

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Recommended Citation

(2002) "Vincentiana Vol. 46, No. 3 [Full Issue]," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 46 : No. 3 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol46/iss3/1>

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6-30-2002

Volume 46, no. 3: May-June 2002

Congregation of the Mission

Recommended Citation

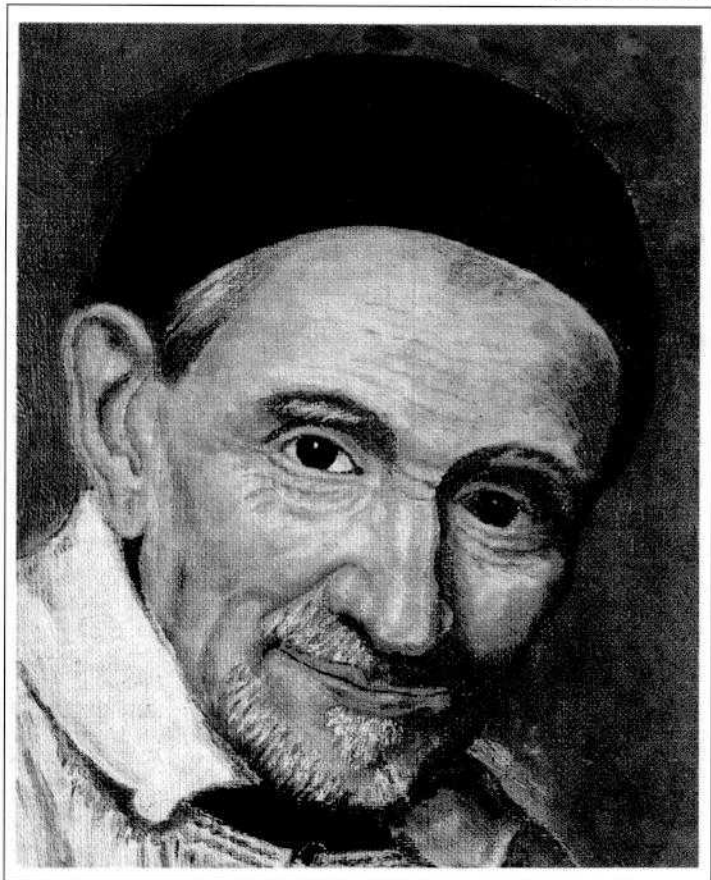
Congregation of the Mission. *Vincentiana*, 46, no. 3 (May-June 2002)

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VINCENTIANA

46^e YEAR - N. 3

MAY-JUNE 2002



Meeting of the Visitors: Animation of the Local Communities"

All Hallows College - Dublin, 4-16 June 2001

VSLPER.
255.77005
V775

v.46
no.3
2002

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

VINCENTIANA

*Magazine of the
Congregation of the Mission
published every two months*

46th Year - N. 3
May-June 2002

Editor

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Publication

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Authorization

Tribunal of Rome
5 December 1974 - n. 15706

Responsible

Giuseppe Guerra, C.M.

Printer

Tipolitography Ugo Detti
Via G. Savonarola, 1
00195 Rome (Italy)
Tel./Fax: 06 39 73 75 32

Subscriptions for 2002

40 € - 40 US \$

Vincentiana is published
in English, French and Spanish,
thanks to the collaboration
of a team of translators

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All Hallows College - Dublin, 4-16 June 2001

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HOLY SEE

Appointment. On 22 March 2002, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican Secretary of State, communicated to Fr. Benjamín Romo, C.M., that, after having studied the list of three candidates presented by the AIC, he has been named Ecclesiastical Assistant of the International Association of Charities (AIC), for a period of three years.

Appointment. On 17 April 2002, by a decree from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Fr. Maloney was named Delegate of the Holy See to preside at the General Chapter of the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul (founded in 1845) from May 4-19, 2002, in Rome.

Beatification Ceremony. On 11 June 2002, the Secretariat of State communicated to Fr. Roberto D'Amico, Postulator General, that the Holy Father has decided that the Beatification Ceremony of the Servant of God Marco Antonio Durando, C.M. (1801-1880), Founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Nazorean, will take place on World Mission Sunday, 20 October 2002, in St. Peter's Square, Rome, together with the beatification of the Servants of God Maria of the Passion, Liduina Meneguzzi, David Okelo, Gildo Irwa, and Andrea Giacinto Longhin.

GENERAL CURIA

Appointments and Confirmations by the Superior General

DATE	NAME	OFFICE	PROVINCE
16-05-2002	FIorentino Giuseppe	Director DC	Naples
29-05-2002	ZONTÁK Stanislav	Visitor	Slovakia
31-05-2002	BERRADE U. Alfonso	Visitor	Peru
06-06-2002	BURBANO Edmundo	Visitor	Equator
07-06-2002	DALY Joseph V.	Director DC	Emmitsburg
07-06-2002	SLEDZIONA John	President	NCV-USA
07-06-2002	SLOWEY Henry	Director DC	Ireland
10-06-2002	AZNAR Manuel	Director DC	Puerto Rico
10-06-2002	CHACOROWSKI José Carlos	Director DC	Curitiba
10-06-2002	ZUPANČIČ Jože	Director DC	Slovenia
19-06-2002	MOREIRA G. Onésio	Director DC	Belo Horizonte
20-06-2002	KUNAY Viktor	Director DC	Hungary

2001 ANNUAL STATISTICS - CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

MINISTRIES - 2001

Number of confreres involved in the ministries listed below. Each confrere is **counted only once**, considered under his principal ministry, as of 31 December 2001.

MINISTRY	PRIESTS	PERMANENT DEACONS	BROTHERS
1. Parish (popular) Missions to the faithful	110		4
2. Missionary parishes or districts	202	1	7
3. Parishes	860	2	17
4. Pilgrimage sanctuaries	39		5
5. Seminaries and clerical formation	156		2
6. Formation of our own exclusively	198		11
7. Missions Ad Gentes	154		6
8. Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain)	149		
9. Schools (primary, secondary, superior, professional)	173		15
10. Social Communications (publications, radio, television)	26		4
11. Special studies	86		3
12. Chaplains: military, immigrants, hospital, associations	167		3
13. Chaplains: Vincentian Lay Groups	79		1
14. Direct Service of the Poor	35		9
15. Manual work	6	1	47
16. Administration	136		13
17. Retired, ill, convalescing	274		29
18. Absence from the Congregation	135		4
19. Other	145		12
TOTAL	3130	4	192

PROVINCE	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS BY PROVINCE - 2001							ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS BY PROVINCE - 2001											
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Permanent Deacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	ADMITTED MEMBERS					ASPIRANTS						
								P*	PD*	CP	CB	TOTAL	Voc. Grps.		Minor Sem.		Prep. Yr.		TOTAL
													TP	TB	TP	TB	TP	TB	
General Curia	3		7				7												
AFRICA	39	4	238		10	8	260			137	13	150	21	4	56	1	38	2	122
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	6		33		1	3	37			24	2	26					8		8
Ethiopia	4	2	37		1		40			15	3	18			15	1			16
Madagascar	9	1	79		4	4	88			22	8	30	9	1			5	1	16
Mozambique	8	1	17		2		20			10		10	12	3	1		14		30
Nigeria	6		39		1		40			60		60					11	1	12
St. Justin de Jacobis	6		33		1	1	35			6		6			40				40
NORTH AMERICA	62		383	1	35	3	422			15	2	17		2			11		13
Eastern (USA)	25		171		11	2	184			11		11					5		5
Midwest (USA)	16		118		18	1	137			4		4		1			6		7
New England (USA)	7		30		3		33					0							0
Southern (USA)	5		25		1		26					0							0
West (USA)	9		39	1	2		42				2	2		1					1
LATIN AMERICA	148	14	715		43	43	815	1		145	5	151	347	7	71	2	36	1	464
Argentina	8		38			2	40			8	1	9	9		3		6		18
Curitiba (Brazil)	9	3	62		3	4	72			5		5	110				2		112
Fortaleza (Bazil)	3		38			2	40			2		2	12				4		16
Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	14	3	72		9	4	88			22		22	30	2			13		45

PROVINCE	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS BY PROVINCE - 2001							ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS BY PROVINCE - 2001												
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Permanent Deacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	ADMITTED MEMBERS					ASPIRANTS							
								P*	PD*	CP	CB	TOTAL	Voc. Grps.		Minor Sem.		Prep. Yr.		TOTAL	
													TP	TB	TP	TB	TP	TB		
Central America	9	3	40		3	3	49			6		6	14		9	1	2	1	27	
Chile	7		23		3	2	28			5	1	6	6						6	
Colombia	22	3	137		14	6	160			42		42	122	3					125	
Costa Rica	4		17		2	2	21			1		1							0	
Cuba	5		11				11					0	9						9	
Ecuador	5		29			3	32			13		13					3		3	
Mexico	21	1	83		4	8	96			14		14			37				37	
Peru	12	1	51			2	54			22		22					2		2	
Puerto Rico	15		55		5	5	65			12	1	13	35		22	1			58	
Venezuela	14		59				59	1		7	2	10		2			4		6	
ASIA	59	3+1Pat	388		16	18	426	2		124	1	127	1	1	119		37		158	
China	4	1	43		1		45	2		1		3							0	
Northern India	11	1	68		4	3	76			40		40			51				51	
Southern India	11		66		2		68			22		22			55				55	
Indonesia	11		88		1	6	95			54		54			5		5		10	
Orient	8	1 Pat	40		3	2	46			2		2	1	1	8				10	
Philippines	14	1	83		5	7	96			5	1	6					32		32	
EUROPE	234	8	1345	3	86	32	1474	1	2	106	3	112	25	3	42		23	4	97	
Austria	5		17		3		20					0							0	
Belgium	3		12				12					0							0	

St. Cyril and Methodius	5		22				22			9		9					5		5
Paris (France)	20		107		12	13	132		2	47	1	50	7	2			5	1	15
Toulouse (France)	13		65		7	5	77			1		1	2						2
Germany	4		13		2		15			1		1							0
Hungary	3		13		1		14			1		1	4						4
Ireland	16		86				86					0							0
Naples (Italy)	11	1	56		2	1	60			2	1	3	3				1		4
Rome (Italy)	10	1	54	1	3	1	60			1		1					5		5
Turin (Italy)	15		88	1	4		93					0							0
Netherlands	6		59		3		62					0							0
Poland	28	3	248		5	2	258			8		8							0
Portugal	11	1	54		2	1	58					0	3		24		1		28
Slovakia	8		32		5	2	39			19		19	6	1			3	2	12
Slovenia	9	2	45		4	3	54			3		3							0
Barcelona (Spain)	10		48		2	1	51			4	1	5					2	1	3
Madrid (Spain)	17		115		16	1	132			3		3			13		1		14
Salamanca (Spain)	20		91		12		103	1		4		5							0
Zaragoza (Spain)	20		120	1	3	2	126			3		3			5				5
OCEANIA	7		54		5	2	61			9		9							0
Australia	7		54		5	2	61			9		9							0
TOTAL	552	29+1 Pat	3130	4	195	106	3465	4	2	536	24	566	394	17	288	3	145	7	854

P* = Priests; PD* = Permanent Deacons; CP = Candidates to the Priesthood; CB = Candidates to the Brotherhood; * Priests or permanent deacons coming from a diocese or another Institute; TP = Aspirants to the Priesthood; TB = Aspirants to the Brotherhood.

Letter of the Superior General to the Visitors convoking the 40th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission

Rome, 5-29 July 2004

Rome, 8 June 2002

To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

Today, in accord with Article 138 of our Constitutions, I am convoking the 40th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission. After consulting the Visitors and investigating a large number of possible sites, we reached the decision, at *a tempo forte* session of our General Council, to hold the General Assembly once again in Rome at Casa Maria Immacolata, Via Ezio 28, 00192 Rome. The Assembly will begin at 9 a.m. on Monday, July 5, 2004 (with all of the participants arriving either on July 3 or 4), and will end at 7 p.m. on Thursday, July 29, 2004 (with the possibility of delegates departing on July 30 or 31st). At the same meeting of the General Council, having consulted the Visitors in Dublin and then undertaking a more detailed consultation with them by mail, we chose as the theme of the Assembly the topic most commonly proposed by the Visitors; namely,

Our Vincentian identity today, having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years — An evaluation and three challenges for the future.

In accord with Statute 88 § 1, "having heard the provincials and paying attention to different regions and works" we have also appointed a Preparatory Commission, whose members are:

Fr. Corpus Delgado	(Zaragoza, Spain)
Fr. Manuel Ginete	(Philippines)
Fr. Jorge Pedroza	(Mozambique)
Fr. John Sledziona	(New England, USA)
Fr. Simão Valenga	(Curitiba, Brazil)

Even as I write, the Commission is holding its first meeting here in Rome and will soon be in contact with you to ask your help in beginning preparation for the General Assembly, which will also elect a new Superior General.

I deeply appreciate your most generous service to the Congregation and ask your assistance now as we begin to work toward the Assembly.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

CPAG 2004

Letter from the Preparatory Commission for the 2004 General Assembly to the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

Rome, 30 June 2002

Dear Father,

The grace of our Lord be always with us.

After having listened to the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission at the meeting in Dublin (June 2001), and having received the responses to the consultation of 20 December 2001, the Superior General, with his Council, has proposed as the theme of the next General Assembly:

Our Vincentian identity today, having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years — An evaluation and three challenges for the future.

In the same letter, the Superior General has fixed the place and date of the General Assembly: Rome, 5-29 July 2004.

We, the members of the Preparatory Commission, met in Rome from 3-9 June 2002, in our first working session, to formulate some proposals which may help the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies to prepare for the 2004 General Assembly.

At this time, we are sending you the **CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**. We hope it will be useful in animating the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. With the responses and reactions from each of the Provinces, the Preparatory Commission will draw up a **DOCUMENTUM LABORIS** for the 2004 General Assembly.

Along with the Consultation Document, we are sending you a CD which contains the articles published in *Vincentiana* (4-5/2000) under the title: "The New Constitutions: 20 Years of Existence." Using this format, your Provincial Preparatory Commission will be able to

select articles which may help in deepening your study of the Constitutions.

We are also sending you:

- a Model for the certification of the election of Delegates to the General Assembly;
- and Guidelines for the presentation of Postulates to the General Assembly.

Upon receiving these documents, in accordance with the Norms of your Province, you should begin the preparation for the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. We suggest that they be held between September 2002 and October 2003. The report from your province should reach the General Curia **on or before 30 October 2003**.

In addition to sending to the Secretary General all the documentation from your Provincial Assembly, we would appreciate it if you would send also, by e-mail, the responses of your province to the Consultation Document, as an attached file, in Word format. This would facilitate the work of our Commission.

The celebration of the Assemblies constitutes a privileged moment *“to preserve and promote the spirituality and apostolic vitality of the Congregation”* (C. 135). We ask the Lord that these efforts bring about a more focused response to the challenges facing our Vincentian identity today, after having lived our Constitutions for 20 years.

With assurances of our prayer, we extend to you our fraternal greetings.

*John Sledziona, Simão Valenga, Manuel Ginete,
Corpus Delgado Jorge Pedroza*

CPAG 2004

40th General Assembly 2004: Consultation Document

INTRODUCTION

On 8 June 2002, in his letter to the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission, the Superior General convoked the 40th General Assembly (to be held in Rome on 5-29 June 2004) and proposed this theme:

Our Vincentian Identity today, having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years — An evaluation and three challenges for the future.

As we all know, our Constitutions are the result of a **long period of discernment** by the Congregation of the Mission in response to the call of the Second Vatican Council to revise its fundamental law and formulate more clearly its proper charism. The extraordinary Assembly of 1968-1969 elaborated a first draft of the Constitutions. The 1974 Assembly, in addition to redrafting some sections of the Constitutions, formulated a few Declarations in order to illuminate, stimulate, and direct the effort of the entire Congregation and each of its members. These declarations contributed, in fact, to focusing and enriching some themes of the Constitutions. The 1980 General Assembly, after thorough and refined work, rewrote the entire text of the Constitutions.¹ Having been presented to and approved by the Holy See, they took effect on 25 March 1985.

¹ Cf. In *Vincentiana* the texts approved by the General Assemblies: *Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis* (1969) in *Vincentiana* (1969) 85-126; *Declarationes* (1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974), 286-302. *Constitutiones et Statuta. Textus completus Conventus Generalis anni 1968-1969 emendatus a Conventu XXXV* (1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974), 303-345; *Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis* (1980) in *Vincentiana* (1980), 193-268. "Promulgación de las Constituciones" (1984) in *Vincentiana* (1985), 1-11. To study the path taken by the Congregation up to the promulgation of the present Constitutions, cf. M. PÉREZ FLORES, "Desde las Constituciones de 1954 a las de 1980" in *Vincentiana* (1984), 751-784; "De las Constituciones de 1980 a las de 1984" in *Vincentiana* (1985) 84-146; C. BRAGA, "Las

In promulgating the new Constitutions on 27 September 1984, Fr. Richard McCullen declared: *"Within the covers of this book our identity as a Congregation in the Church is delineated."* He expressed his fervent desire in these words: *"We must not be content to leave that delineation on paper alone. The text must now be imprinted on our hearts and lived out in our vocation to preach the Gospel to the poor. For that purpose much reflective reading and prayer of our Constitutions is called for and it is my hope, and indeed the hope of us all, that these Constitutions will be the means that will enable us more effectively to love what Saint Vincent loved and practiced what he taught."*²

How much have persons, communities, and provinces changed since the new Constitutions went into effect? Have they become a book for our life in the Congregation or a book for the library? Twenty years have passed — what is the result?

The next General Assembly (2004) hopes to start from this reflection/evaluation. It will not deal so much with evaluating the text, as with **evaluating and revising our life and mission in the light of the Constitutions**. Each missionary, each community, each province, and the entire Congregation is asked to reflect sincerely how our Vincentian identity, defined by the Constitutions, is expressed in our lives. Twenty years have passed since the Constitutions were proposed to us as light for the journey; we wish now to put ourselves under their dynamic power once again.

The Constitutions have balanced the necessary juridical elements with the more charismatic ones; they drank from the fountain of the Word of God and the attitudes of Christ, the Rule of the Mission; they realized the intuitions of St. Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian tradition in order to give impetus to our lives as we follow Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor. For these reasons, the Constitutions are a **permanent reference** against which we must confront ourselves constantly.

The theme of the next General Assembly (2004) intends to involve us all. It is **in the life of each missionary and each local community** where we live out the Vincentian identity today.

Constituciones de la Congregación de la Misión: notas históricas" in *Vincentiana* (2000), 291-308. To do an in-depth study of the various centers of interest of the Constitutions, see the articles published in *Vincentiana* (2000), 283-424, under the title: "The New Constitutions: 20 Years of Existence." Other studies on the Constitutions: E. ANTONELLO, "36ª Asamblea General de la Congregación de la Misión" in *Vincentiana* (1980), 334-354; C. BRAGA, "Le nuove Costituzioni della Congregazione della Missione" in *Vincentiana* (1981), 63-82; J.O. BAYLACH, "Comentando las Nuevas Constituciones" in *Vincentiana* (1981), 222-227 and 384-409; M. PÉREZ FLORES, "Comentario a las Constituciones" in *Vincentiana* (1982), 147-187.

² *Vincentiana* (1985), 5.

From the time the Constitutions were drafted to today, there have been many and very noteworthy **changes** within our communities and provinces, as well as in the Church and in the entire world. The most recent General Assemblies of the Congregation have offered proposals in order to bring up-to-date our vocation and mission.³ With the same pastoral orientation, the next General Assembly (2004) will have to articulate the **challenges** we Vincentians need to face in the near future.

CONSULTATION FOR THE DOMESTIC AND PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES

In order to draw up the DOCUMENTUM LABORIS for the next General Assembly (2004), the Preparatory Commission has formulated some questions for the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. These questions deal with the **essential elements of our Vincentian identity**.

Please answer them personally, as a local community and as a province. (Kindly send to the Preparatory Commission *only the responses from the Provincial Assembly*).

1. We evaluate

- 1.1. **Vocation.** How is the articulation of our vocation in the present Constitutions (cf. nn. 1-9) contributing to the deepening of our Vincentian identity? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.
- 1.2. **Apostolic activity.** How does the apostolic activity in your (local, provincial) community make explicit our Vincentian identity (cf. nn. 10-18, especially n. 12)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.
- 1.3. **Community life.** How is your experience of community life contributing to the deepening of our Vincentian identity (cf. nn. 19-27)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.

³ The 1986 General Assembly offered to the entire Congregation the *Lines of Action 1986-1992*, cf. *Vincentiana* (1986), 549-605. The 1992 General Assembly, with its *Letter to the Confreres* set forth various commitments with a view to *New Evangelization, New Men, New Communities*, cf. *Vincentiana* (1992), 362-368. The 1998 General Assembly promoted collaboration with the various groups of the Vincentian Family in order to respond to the challenges of the mission: *With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the threshold of the new Millennium*, cf. *Vincentiana* (1998), 384-397.

- 1.4. Spiritual life.** What efforts are we making in order to know and appropriate the Vincentian spiritual experience (following of Christ, evangelical counsels, proper virtues, prayer, missionary spirituality...) and how do we express it in our lives as missionaries (cf. nn. 28-50)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.
 - 1.5. Formation.** How do we impart to and share with our candidates our vocation, charism, values, ministries, spirit... all the elements proper to our Vincentian identity (cf. nn. 77-95)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.
 - 1.6. Corresponsibility, subsidiarity, active participation.** How do we in our communities (province) practice the principles of corresponsibility, dialogue, collaboration, subsidiarity, active participation, service (cf. nn. 96-100)? How do these principles contribute to the deepening of our Vincentian identity? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.
 - 1.7. Temporal goods.** How is our Vincentian identity shown in the way we use and administer temporal goods (cf. nn. 148-155)? Please give some concrete examples of success and difficulty.
-
- 2. We direct our attention to the principal changes in the last 20 years**
 - 2.1.** In your opinion, what are the principal changes that have taken place in the situation of the Church and society in the last 20 years, particularly in relation to the aspirations of the poor?
 - 2.2.** What impact have these changes made on the Vincentian identity of our (local, provincial) community?
 - 2.3.** What implications do these changes have for our Vincentian identity today?
-
- 3. We articulate three (3) challenges for the future of the Congregation of the Mission**
 - 3.1.** After having evaluated the principal elements of our Vincentian identity today, taking into consideration the implications of the social and ecclesial changes in the last 20 years, what are the **three (3) most important challenges** that the community on the local and provincial levels will have to face in the coming years?
 - 3.2.** How will the community on the local and provincial level respond concretely to these challenges? Please be as precise as possible.

PROPOSED PROCESS FOR THE DOMESTIC AND PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES

The Assemblies offer all of us in the Congregation a time of grace, renewal and a celebration of fidelity. So that the theme proposed by the Superior General for the next Assembly might inspire our lives in the coming years, it is not enough simply to answer some questions formulated by the Commission. Why not spend the time of the Assemblies as an occasion for animation and growth?

1. Embracing our Constitutions wholeheartedly

Undoubtedly, the younger confreres have had the occasion to read and deepen their understanding of the Constitutions during the time of the Internal Seminary or during various formation meetings. Perhaps the older confreres were able to participate in some formal study of the Constitutions. But, in the midst of day to day activities, many times we take for granted those principles which inspire our lives. We hardly turn to the Constitutions, except to resolve some questions that arise from our community conversation.

To prepare for the Domestic Assemblies, it would be very appropriate for each confrere to dedicate time for reading and deepening his appreciation for the Constitutions, especially for its more charismatic elements. Each missionary ought to take to heart the content of our Constitutions.

2. Praying our Constitutions

Each confrere may deepen his appreciation for the Constitutions by bringing them to prayer. In prayer the Lord invites us to embrace his plan. Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor, calls each one of us to follow him by identifying ourselves with his own attitudes. Likewise, it is a time for us to give thanks for the great gift of our vocation. It is a time to pray for our brothers in community, for the Mission in the world, and for the sufferings of the poor. It is a time to ask pardon for our lukewarm attitudes and lack of commitment, personally and as communities. Finally, it is a time to contemplate in order to proclaim and to serve.

The time of preparation and celebration of our Domestic, Provincial and General Assemblies could prove very fruitful if each missionary makes the effort to pray the Constitutions.

3. Focusing our attention on our Vincentian identity today

Those who have studied them carefully stress the essential value of some articles in the Constitutions. The Preparatory Commission suggests that we focus our attention on key articles that spell out our Vincentian identity decisively. After having deepened our appreciation for the Constitutions, and having brought them to prayer, it would be useful to devote major attention to these key articles which may illuminate our reflection and our contributions to the Assemblies.

4. Moving from personal reflection to communal sharing

The work proposed for the Assemblies involves three movements:

- Toward the last 20 years since the promulgation of the Constitutions in order to evaluate how they have energized our life and mission.
- Toward the concrete situation that impacts on our Vincentian identity today in order to remain faithful to the vocation which the Constitutions describe.
- Toward the challenges that we need to confront in creative fidelity during the coming years.

If each missionary makes the dedicated effort to reflect on the questions proposed for the work of the Assembly, our sharing will become more fruitful, both on the level of the community and of the province. In this way, we will succeed in identifying better the way the Congregation ought to take in the future. Thus, we will appropriate our Vincentian identity even more.

5. Answering the questions

If each missionary and each community and province follow the plan described here, answering the questions would not be a tedious exercise but an expression of commitment — a commitment animated by the Spirit who inspired Vincent de Paul and still inspires the Congregation in order to continue in the world the Mission of Jesus Christ, Evangelizer and Servant of the poor.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

As we draw up the synthesis of the responses from the Provincial Assemblies, it would be most helpful to us in the Preparatory Commission if your reports were written as concretely and concisely as possible.

We appreciate your interest and we remind you that the responses to this Consultation Document, together with the form for the election of delegate(s), should arrive at the Secretariat of the General Curia on or before 30 October 2003.

Rome, 30 June 2002

CPAG 2004

Certificate of the Election of the Delegates for the General Assembly

Model

PROVINCE OF

Date of the election of the delegate(s)

Number of confreres with active voice in the province on the election
day

The province, in conformity with the Constitutions (art. 139) and
Statutes (art. 87) of the Congregation of the Mission, elected as
delegate(s) and substitute(s) for the 2004 General Assembly the
confreres:

Delegate(s):

Family and First (Christian) Name	Date of Birth	Date of Vocation

Substitute(s):

Family and First (Christian) Name	Date of Birth	Date of Vocation

The delegate(s) and the substitute(s), duly elected, accept their election and
declare their willingness to be present at the General Assembly, which will
begin on 5 July 2004 in the Casa Maria Immacolata, Via Ezio, Rome.

(Signatures of the Visitor, the Secretary of the Assembly, the delegate(s) and
substitute(s).

Date of the Certificate and seal

CPAG 2004

Indications for the Presentation of Posulates to the General Assembly

1. Every missionary, community, province or region of the Congregation of the Mission has the legitimate right to send its wishes, suggestions and petitions to the General Assembly (cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 631, 3°).
2. Not every wish, suggestion or petition presented to the General Assembly is, *per se*, a postulate. A postulate, properly so-called, is every petition, desire or suggestion legitimately sent to the General Assembly by a physical or moral person of the Congregation, **in view of the good of the entire Congregation** or of almost the entire Congregation, be it according to the Constitutions and Statutes, be it against the Constitutions and Statutes, be it outside the Constitutions and Statutes, and which the General Assembly must treat.

Concretely, the following constitute material for a postulate:

- Requesting some modification in the Constitutions (cf. C. 137, 4°), or in the Statutes (cf. C. 137, 3°);
 - Asking to have a Decree promulgated (cf. C. 137, 3°);
 - Requesting the authentic interpretation of some point of the Statutes (cf. C. 137, 5°);
 - Asking that the authentic interpretation of some point of the Constitutions be requested of the Holy See (cf. C. 137, 5°);
 - Requesting a declaration of doctrinal or exhortative character;
 - Requesting that the General Assembly include some particular theme in the project of the Congregation for the next six years.
3. The General Assembly, as the supreme authority of the Congregation, has the right to determine which of those presented as postulates it desires to treat during the Assembly itself and which it does not, referring the latter, as it sees fit, to

other forums (Superior General, General Council, Visitor, Provincial Council or Assembly, etc.).

4. Before the General Assembly, the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, names a special Commission to study the postulates received and to make appropriate recommendations to the Assembly as to how those postulates should be studied, always safeguarding the right of the Assembly to discuss and study them as it wishes (Directory of the General Assembly 38, 1°).
5. Postulates are approved by an absolute majority of the valid votes, with the exception of those which suppose an amendment to the Constitutions or request an authentic interpretation which must be sent to the Holy See (cf. C. 137, 4° and 5°), for which a majority of two-thirds is required (Directory of the General Assembly 38, 2°).
6. To facilitate the work of the Assembly, it is helpful that the postulates be formed with attention to these **formal criteria**:
 - 6.1. Each postulate must be limited to presenting only one point and must be drafted on an independent sheet.
 - 6.2. The postulate must be written in a positive/declarative sense, in such a way as to allow one to pronounce clearly with a YES or a NO.
 - 6.3. Each postulate must be motivated in a clear and precise way, distinguishing between the postulate properly so-called and its motivation. The name of persons or communities (province or region) who present it must also be included in the presentation of the postulate.
 - 6.4. It is not convenient to be lavish in the presentation of postulates, nor to propose to the General Assembly that which could be the result of taking into account the principles of co-responsibility, unity in diversity, subsidiarity and decentralization (cf. C. 98).

Rome, 20 May 2002

To the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of God, Our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Each year, about this time, we write to ask the members of our Vincentian Family to begin to prepare for the day of common prayer that we celebrate annually around September 27. Last year we invited all our branches to focus, for the first time in our history, on a common theme: "The Globalization of Charity: The Fight Against Hunger." The response has been enormous. On all the continents our members have designed creative projects to fight against hunger. Descriptions of hundreds of such projects have been sent to us. With you, I thank God today for all your labors in this regard. As an incentive to those who wish to begin further projects, we have published, in the bulletins of the various branches of our Family, outlines of a number of projects that have already been undertaken. Further descriptions can be found on our web site (www.famvin.org).

This year, while continuing the Campaign Against Hunger, we have decided to undertake a new, parallel initiative; namely, we are sending you a prayer which we hope will come to be used frequently, perhaps even daily, in all the branches of our Vincentian Family. At the annual meeting of those responsible for many of the principal branches of our Family, we worked at composing this prayer together, using some preexisting models, and we also chose a graphic that would be on the front side of the prayer card that we urge all the branches of the Family to publish. For your convenience, I am enclosing a copy of the prayer card, which we hope will be printed in each country and distributed on or around September 27. On our web site you will find the prayer in five languages, along with the graphic. These can be downloaded for your use (<http://www.famvin.org/oratio/>).

As you can imagine, the number of prayer cards to be printed and distributed in some countries will be enormous. In order that this might be done at a reasonable cost, we suggest that the heads of the various branches of the Family in each country (or, if it seems feasible, groups of countries) work out together a way in which the prayer card can be printed and distributed, with the costs being shared. We recommend that, when the members of the Family come together for the annual day of prayer on September 27, the prayer

card would be distributed, with some explanation, and that the prayer be used together for the first time, while suggesting that it be prayed frequently, even daily, in the future by the members of our Family, whether as individuals at home, or in common during meetings, etc.

In order to facilitate the organization of the annual day of prayer, we are attaching a page of guidelines, as usual.

Few things were more important to St. Vincent than prayer. It is a "fountain of youth," he told us (SV IX, 217), by which we are invigorated. It is refreshment in the midst of daily work in the service of the poor (SV IX, 416). It is a gentle dew that refreshes the soul every morning (SV IX, 402). Today, with you, we ask the Lord to make us deeply prayerful, gospel-centered servants of the poor.

Patricia Palacios de Nava

President A.I.C.
(founded in 1617)

Yvon Laroche, R.S.V.

Superior General
Religious of St. Vincent de Paul
(founded in 1845)

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General
Congregation of the Mission
(founded in 1625)

Gladys Abi-Saïd

President
Vincentian Marian Youth
(founded in 1847)

Juana Elizondo, D.C.

Superior General
Daughters of Charity
(founded in 1633)

Charles Shelby, C.M.

Miraculous Medal Association
(founded in 1909)

José Ramón Díaz Torremocha

President
St. Vincent de Paul Society
(founded in 1833)

Eva Villar

President MISEVI
(founded in 1999)

GUIDELINES FOR 27 SEPTEMBER 2002

1. The heads of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, AIC, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, JMV, MISEVI, the Miraculous Medal Association, and the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul in each city or area should meet as soon as possible in order to begin to plan the prayer celebration. After receiving this letter, would you please contact one another by phone or other suitable means as soon as possible. To facilitate this matter, we ask the superior of the Congregation of the Mission in each area to initiate these contacts. If there are no members of the Congregation of the Mission in the area, then we ask the superior of the Daughters of Charity to be the initiator.
2. Please invite the other branches of the Vincentian Family in your area to join in this celebration (e.g., other groups of laity, sisters, brothers, or priests living in the Vincentian spirit). It is especially important that the young feel at home at our celebrations. Our gathering can be an opportune moment for them to know men and women who share St. Vincent's vision.
3. We encourage you too to provide for the participation of the poor, who evangelize us by their presence.
4. The day of prayer could include a common celebration of the Eucharist or some other communal service, according to the circumstances in each area. If a Mass is not possible, one might envision a celebration of the word, with readings, hymns, prayers, sharing of thoughts, etc. In other contexts, one could envision a "Holy Hour," with the usual liturgical actions (processions, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, readings, etc.).
5. During this year's celebration, the new prayer card could be distributed and explained. Then the prayer could be said together. All could be encouraged to use the prayer frequently in the future, even daily.
6. One could also organize, depending on the circumstances, a moment for ongoing formation and/or for relaxed social contact.
7. The celebration should be organized on or around September 27, in accord with what date would best promote the participation of the various members of our family. It is important that the celebration be truly *communal*, with the active participation of members of the various branches. A wise distribution of roles will guarantee that all groups take part.
8. The readings suggested for the Mass of St. Vincent should be used (Is 52:7-10; 1 Cor 1:26-31, 2:1-2; Mt 5:1-12a), along with, if you judge it helpful, other appropriate selections from St. Vincent's writings. Much will depend on the kind of

celebration that is organized in each area. A prayer of the faithful should be prepared with intentions contributed by members of the various branches of the Vincentian Family.

9. In order to raise consciousness about our annual day of prayer, about our campaign against hunger, and about the new prayer card to be used in our Family, we suggest the following:
 - a) the use of various media to publicize them: articles in the press, announcements on the radio, television, etc.
 - b) the use of our international, national, and local web pages to publicize them.
10. We hope that, around September 27, our Family in each country, might evaluate the projects that have been organized for the Campaign Against Hunger, and, if it seems opportune, initiate others.

Rome, 10 June 2002

*To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission and the
Visitatrixes of the Daughters of Charity*

My very dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

On 22 November 2001, I wrote to give you some news about the First International Meeting of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, which was held here in Rome last October. I enclosed a copy of the Final Document, which, in addition to the commitments made by the representatives of the Association, included five proposals directed to the Director General.

I write today to offer you an account of some of the steps that have been taken to implement those proposals.

1. The first proposal, which received quasi-unanimous approval, was that an organized international structure for the Association should be created. By this letter, I am announcing the nomination of Fr. Charles Shelby as the International Coordinator of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. Fr. Shelby will continue to live and work in Perryville, Missouri, where he is serving as the President of the Association of the Miraculous Medal at St. Mary's of the Barrens. I am also announcing the nomination of a Coordinating Council of the International AMM, which will assist Fr. Shelby. Its members are: Fr. Janusz Zwolinski, C.M. (Congo/Poland), Sr. Marie Yonide Midy, D.C. (Paris/Haiti) and Señorita Martha Tapia (Mexico). In dialogue with Fr. Shelby, I have worked out a detailed job description for the office of International Coordinator, whose principal function is to help the Director General:
 - to assist and animate the National Councils of the AMM, where they already exist, in pursuing the purposes of the Association;
 - to promote the creation of new national structures in countries where they do not yet exist;
 - to offer formation materials to the Association in various countries, or criteria for composing such materials;
 - to encourage the countries to formulate concrete means for putting into practice the commitments made at the International AMM Meeting in Rome in 2001;
 - to supervise a web site for the International AMM.

2. The October meeting's second proposal was that the International Statutes be revised to correspond more fully with some of the experiences shared during the days of the meeting. Twenty-five of the participants approved this proposal and eight voted against it, but another 35 abstained. Upon reflection, it seems to me that the time is not yet ripe for revising the International Statutes, which were approved by the Holy See only in 1997. Actually, they are quite general and leave us room for considerable flexibility. In my judgment, it would be better for us to wait until we have more experience of the different ways in which the Miraculous Medal Association functions in various countries before we engage in the laborious process of revising the Statutes. The Association is still growing and expanding into new countries. The experience of those countries will be useful in any future process of revising the Statutes.
3. The third proposal was that we elaborate some general guidelines for formation in the AMM and offer supporting material for newly created groups. I am happy to say that a significant step has already been taken in this regard with the publication of:

Asociación de la Medalla Milagrosa
Una nueva Imagen para un nuevo Milenio

Editorial La Milagrosa

García de Paredes, 45
28010 Madrid - Spain

Fax: 34 91 593 2369

E-mail: lamilagrosa@auronet.es

Copies can be obtained by writing to the address above (brochure enclosed).

While this book is available only in a Spanish-language version, almost all of the materials contained in the book are also available in English, French, Italian, and Portuguese and can be obtained through the Vincentian Family Office in Rome. If you should wish these materials in one of those languages, please contact:

Benjamín ROMO, C.M.

Curia Generalizia

Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 ROMA - Italy

Fax: 39 06 666 3831

E-mail: famvin@tin.it

For the future, as mentioned above, one of the tasks of the International Coordinator and the Coordinating Council will be to work on guidelines for formation materials.

4. The fourth proposal of October's international meeting was that another international meeting, or General Assembly of the AMM, be convened within the next four years. I envision that this will happen around the year 2005 and, in fact, I hope that such international meetings, or General Assemblies, will be convened on a regular basis after that too. But since my own mandate ends two years from now, I must place this in the hands of my successor!
5. The fifth proposal of the international meeting was the creation of an international bulletin of formation and information.

This is one of the matters that, I am certain, the International Coordinator and Coordinating Council will be treating soon after their mandate begins.

I am deeply grateful to Fr. Shelby, Fr. Zwolinski, Sr. Marie Yonide, and Srita. Tapia for their willingness to take up this new responsibility. I am delighted that the Association is growing and spreading to new countries. I ask the Lord to help all of us, like Mary, to be attentive listeners to his word, to know how to put it into practice very concretely, and to be an evangelizing force "by word and work" wherever we might be.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General

FEATURE:

Meeting of the Visitors: “Animation of the Local Communities”

All Hallows College
Dublin, 4-16 June 2001



Participants in the Meeting of the Visitors: "Animation of the Local Communities"
All Hallows College - Dublin, 4-16 June 2001

Meeting of the Visitors: “Animation of the Local Communities”

All Hallows College - Dublin, 4-16 June 2001

Participants

1. General Curia

FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	GENERAL CURIA
MALONEY	Robert P.	Superior General
FERNÁNDEZ de MENDOZA	José Ignacio	Vicar General
BIELER	Victor	Assistant General
UBILLÚS	José Antonio	Assistant General
KAPUŚCIAK	Józef	Assistant General
NIETO	José María	Secretary General
BAUER	Elmer	Treasurer General
ROMO	Benjamín	Delegate to the Vincentian Family

2. Visitors

FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	PROVINCE
ABBOUD	Antoine	Orient
AIKARA	Jose	Southern India
ALEGRÍA	Gregorio	Puerto Rico
ÁLVAREZ SAGREDO	Félix	Madrid
ALVES DOS SANTOS	Ari	Fortaleza
AZCÁRATE	Santiago	Zaragoza

FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	PROVINCE
BARBOSA LEMOS	João Maria	Portugal
BERRADE	Alfonso	Peru
CASTILLO	Gerardo Antonio	Costa Rica
CHAVES DOS SANTOS	Eli	Rio de Janeiro
CORNÉE	Pierre	Paris
DE LA RIVERA	Carlos	Chile
RAMAROSON	Benjamin	Madagascar
MARTÍNEZ MUEDRA	José Vicente	Barcelona
GAY	George Gregory	Central America
GINETE FUTALAN	Manuel	Philippines
GONELLA	Bruno	Turin
GONZÁLEZ LÓPEZ	Antonio	Venezuela
GONZÁLEZ PRIETO	Manuel	Mexico
GROETELAARS	Victor	Netherlands
GUERRA	Giuseppe	Naples
HAASBACH	Norbert	Germany
HARTENBACH	William E.	U.S.A.-Midwest
IYOLO IYOMBE	Dominique	Congo
KANGLER	Franz	Austria
LÓPEZ MASIDE	José María	Salamanca
ŁUCYSZYN	Józef	Hungary
MARCOS	Gebremedhin	Ethiopia
MARTÍNEZ	Enrique	Argentina
MARTÍNEZ SALAME	Gonzalo	Ecuador
McKENNA	Thomas F.	U.S.A.-Eastern
MOJICA	Noel	Cuba

FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	PROVINCE
NARANJO	Gabriel	Colombia
O'SHEA	Kevin	Ireland
OSUJI	Urban	Nigeria
PASSERINI	Giancarlo	Rome
PEDROZA PÉREZ	Jorge	Mozambique
POGORELC	Zdravko	Slovenia
QUINN	Bernard J.	U.S.A.-Western
RANASINGH	John	Northern India
ROCHE	Paul	Sts. Cyril and Methodius
SAD BUDIANTO	Antonius	Indonesia
SENS	Christian	Toulouse
SIEŃCZAK	Bronisław	Poland
SLANINKA	Augustín	Slovakia
SLEDZIONA	John	U.S.A.-New England
SULLIVAN	Maurice	Australia
VALENGA	Simão	Curitiba
WANG	John	China - Taiwan
WEBER	George J.	U.S.A.-South
ZERACRISTOS	Yosief	St. Justin De Jacobis

3. Other Participants

FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	OFFICE
DELGADO	Corpus	Preparatory Commission
CAMPBELL	Peter	CUSAV
KOLINSKY	Arthur	CLAPVI
MELCHOR	Emilio	CLAPVI

FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	OFFICE
O'DONNELL	Hugh	APVC
O'HERN	Thomas	COVIAM
TYPAMM	Emmanuel	COVIAM
ZAKRĘTA	Arkadiusz	CEVIM
RYBOLT	John	CIF - Paris
LOUGHLAN	Sofield	Expert
BARQUÍN	Teodoro	Translator
CURRAN	Eugene	Translator
GARCÍA	Bernard	Translator
KENNEDY	John	Translator
KIEKEN	Noël	Translator
MARTÍNEZ	Augustín	Translator
DOUGHERTY	Ann Mary	Secretary
SANNO	Teresa	Secretary

Meeting of the Visitors: “Animation of the Local Communities”

All Hallows College - Dublin, 4-16 June 2001

Program

Monday, 4 June

- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 Welcome (Kevin Rafferty)
- 9:45 Methodology of the Meeting (Corpus Delgado)
- 10:00 The Vincentian Community Today (Fr. Robert Maloney)
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Personal work: Vincentian texts and synthesis of the Visitors' replies
- 13:00 Lunch and break
- 15:30 Sharing among the Visitors. Group work
- 16:30 Break
- 17:00 Eucharist in common (Fr. Robert Maloney)
- 18:00 Supper. Free time
- 19:00 Secretaries' Meeting (Corpus Delgado)

Tuesday, 5 June

- 7:30 Lauds and Eucharist in language groups
 - N. Haasbach (Ger): English-German
 - J.V. Martínez (Bar): Spanish-Portuguese
 - P. Cornée (Par): French-Italian
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 The context of community life in the provinces
(Presentation of the Secretaries. Open discussion)
- 10:30 Break
- 11:00 Living in community. Creating community (Loughlan Sofield)
- 13:00 Lunch and break

- 15:30 Living in community. Creating community (Loughlan Sofield)
16:30 Break
17:00 Living in community. Creating community (Loughlan Sofield)
18:00 Supper. Free time

Wednesday, 6 June

- 7:30 Lauds and Eucharist in language groups
W. Hartenbach (Ocn): English-German
J.M. Barbosa (Lus): Spanish-Portuguese
B. Gonella (Tau): French-Italian
8:30 Breakfast
9:30 Living in community. Creating community (Loughlan Sofield)
11:00 Break
11:30 Living in community. Creating community (Loughlan Sofield)
13:00 Lunch and break
15:30 Living in community. Creating community (Loughlan Sofield)
16:30 Break
17:00 Living in community. Creating community (Loughlan Sofield)
18:00 Supper. Free time

Thursday, 7 June

- Outing. Pilgrimage to Glendalough (Celtic Spirituality)
Eucharist in common (Kevin Rafferty)

Friday, 8 June

- 7:30 Lauds and Eucharist in language groups
J. Aikara (InM): English-German
G. Castillo (Cos): Spanish-Portuguese
A. Abboud (Ori): French-Italian
8:30 Breakfast
9:30 Theological dimension of Vincentian community life (Ignacio F. Mendoza)
• Work of texts in groups of three
• Sharing in language groups
11:00 Break

- 11:30 The Vincentian community project (José Antonio Ubillús)
- Personal reflection of a community project
 - Group work
- 13:00 Lunch and break
- 15:30 Panel: The Animation of the Visitor in the local communities.
U. Osuji (Nig); B. Quinn; (OCC); E. Chaves dos Santos (Flu);
F. Kangler (Aus)
- 16:30 Break
- 17:00 Experiences of community prayer
Lectio divina: P. Roche (SCM). Revision of Life: A. Sad
Budianto (Ids)
- 18:00 Supper. Free time

Saturday, 9 June

- 7:30 Eucharist in common
Jorge Pedroza (Moz)
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 Vincentian community, community for the mission
(S. Azcárate - Cae)
- Work groups on "models of community"
 - Sharing in language groups
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 The Vincentian local superior (Józef Kapuściak)
- Dialogue
- 12:30 Concrete suggestions. Group work
- 13:00 Lunch and break
- 15:30 Concrete suggestions: presentations of the conclusions.
Synthesis of the week
- 16:30 Suggestions for a free day in Dublin (Kevin Rafferty)
Break
- 17:00 Experiences of community prayer
Reading of reality through the eyes of faith: S. Valenga (Cur)
Fraternal promotion: G. Passerini (Rom)
- 18:00 Supper. Free time

Sunday, 10 June

Free day

Monday, 11 June

- 7:30 Eucharist in common
J. Lucyszyn (Hun)
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 Presentation of work for the second week (Corpus Delgado)
Panel: The international missions of the Congregation of the Mission
V. Bieler; H. O'Donnell; G. Guerra (Nea); B. Sienczak (Pol);
C. Rivera (Chi)
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 The Vincentian Family (Benjamín Romo).
• Dialogue
- 12:30 Concrete suggestions. Group work
- 13:00 Lunch and break
- 15:30 CIF: International Formation Center (J. Rybolt)
• Dialogue
- 16:30 Break
- 17:00 The path taken by the Visitors' Conferences (José María Nieto)
• Dialogue
- 17:40 Suggestions for the work of the Conferences (Manuel Ginete)
- 18:00 Supper. Free time

Tuesday, 12 June

- 7:30 Liturgy. Celebration by Conferences
- 8:30 Breakfast
Work of the Conferences (COVIAM, CLAPVI, CUSAV, APVC,
CEVIM)

Wednesday, 13 June

- 7:30 Liturgy. Celebration by Conferences
- 8:30 Breakfast
Work of the Conferences (COVIAM, CLAPVI, CUSAV, APVC,
CEVIM)

Thursday, 14 June

- 7:30 Lauds and Eucharist in language groups
Zeracristos Yosief (SJJ): English-German
A. Alves dos Santos (For): Spanish-Portuguese
A. Slaninka (Slk): French-Italian
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 Influences of the conclusions of the last General Assembly on the life of the provinces and the communities (Spokespersons for the Conferences)
- Dialogue
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Panel: Interprovincial and intercontinental collaboration: Formation.
A. Berrade (Per); M. González (Mex); J. M. López Maside (Sal); M. Sullivan (Aul)
- 13:00 Lunch and break
- 15:30 Afternoon: Dedicated to visiting some places of interest in Dublin

Friday, 15 June

- 7:30 Lauds and Eucharist in language groups
J. Sledziona (Nan): English-German
G. Alegría (Por): Spanish-Portuguese
D. Iyolo (Cng): French-Italian
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 Panel: Interprovincial and intercontinental collaboration: Mutual help. Financial help. Twinning
E. Bauer III; C. Sens; (Tol); G. Naranjo (Col); G. Weber (Mer); J. Ranasingh (InS); F. Álvarez (Mat)
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Reorganization of the provinces (T. McKenna)
- Dialogue by continental groups
- 13:00 Lunch and break
- 15:30 Web Site of the Vincentian Family (E. Bauer)
- Dialogue
- 16:30 Break

- 17:00 Open dialogue with the Superior General and the members of the Curia
- 18:30 Festive meal

Saturday, 16 June

- 7:30 Prayer in language groups
- J. Wang (Sin): English-German
- N. Mojica (Cub): Spanish-Portuguese
- J. Kapuściak: French-Italian
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 The theme of the next General Assembly
- Dialogue in groups
- 10:30 Break
- 11:00 Evaluation of the Meeting (Gregory Gay)
- 11:30 • Presentation of proposals on the theme of the next General Assembly
- Evaluation of the meeting: open dialogue
- 12:15 Closing Eucharist (Fr. Robert Maloney)

Meeting of the Visitors: “Animation of the Local Communities”

All Hallows College - Dublin, 4-16 June 2001

Chronicle

by Christian Sens, C.M.

Visitor of Toulouse

On 3 June, the feast of Pentecost, we were awaited at All Hallows College for the meeting of the **Visitors** scheduled to begin the following day. The fraternal and happy atmosphere was to remain with us all during our two weeks here.

I invite you now to follow me through this journal that I agreed to write, to understand a little of what we did. I am going to simply list the conferences, which have been presented in this number of *Vincentiana*.

Monday 4

Kevin Rafferty welcomed us, and **Corpus Delgado**, a member of the planning committee, and moderator, explained the purpose of the meeting, which was to make visible the fraternal communion of the C.M. The first week would be centered on local communities and on the role of the **Visitor** in animating them.

The **Superior General** suggested a goal: “*The construction of a healthy ecosystem for the community*” and we then listened to a summary of the responses of the **Visitors** to the questionnaire sent out by the planning committee. During the group sessions to follow, the **Visitors** were asked to point out the positive aspects as well as the difficulties that they see in the life of the local communities.

Fr. Maloney presided at the closing Eucharist of this first day. We ate supper at 6:00, as we did each day. The long evenings allowed for meetings, discussions, walks in the city of Dublin, and possibly visits to pubs!

Tuesday 5 - Wednesday 6

We heard reports of the group work accomplished the previous day. The positive aspects in the life of local communities are the community plan, fraternal relations among the confreres, a real interest in community life, especially among the youngest confreres, and a simple lifestyle. The difficulties that were reported are individualism and activism, generational differences, and differences in languages and cultures, as well as the difficulty of finding superiors who favor creativity.

We welcomed an expert from the U.S.A., **Brother Loughlan Sofield**, who would stay with us for two days. By small steps, he led us through the maze of community life, the steps to take in building community, the problems and the ways of facing them. He specified that community is first the lived experience that is the source of beliefs and convictions about what community is or ought to be. These beliefs arouse in each person emotions and feelings that in turn generate ways of living. The goal of community living is the mission of evangelizing the poor. A balance therefore has to be found between community life and mission, while not forgetting that the community is an integral part of the mission. Of course, new forms of community living have to be found, instead of just thinking in former patterns. Community life is built up day by day and demands confidence, brotherhood, faith sharing, evaluation, support and an orientation toward the mission, acceptance of differences, the capacity for dialogue, and recognition of the gifts of each person. No community is free of conflicts, but it is a sign of a mature community that it can confront these. What characterizes this is not the absence of conflicts but the presence of pardon. It can happen that fatigue, even exhaustion, wear us out, and our community life then becomes really difficult. Is this because of an overload of work, or rather because our expectations are not met?

Thursday 7

We went on pilgrimage to *Glendalough*, center of Celtic spirituality. St. Kevin founded a monastery here in the sixth century. The missionary who guided us invited us to undertake an interior pilgrimage, the pilgrimage of life. The Eucharist was celebrated in a ruined church, in the open air. There was no altar, but three Visitors held, with great dignity, the chalices and the paten in their hands. Several times, the missionary reminded us that only silence will let us accomplish an interior pilgrimage... but we had so many things to share!

Friday 8

Two conferences followed by group work took up the morning. **Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza** reminded us of the "*the theological dimension of the Vincentian community*," and **José Antonio Ubillús** offered us "*the Vincentian community plan*."

The afternoon was set aside for the theme of the Visitor as an animator of local communities. During a panel discussion, four Visitors shared their thoughts.

- **Franz Kangler** is the Visitor of the Province of Austria. Tensions arose and some confreres had a hard time accepting his residence in Istanbul instead of in Austria. His first concern was to calm things down, and to renew the bonds among the confreres by proposing spiritual meetings twice a year, as well as times of common relaxation. At the end of two years, the climate changed, and relationships became more confident and open. The current perspective is to develop the meaning of a common membership between the Austrian confreres and the Polish confreres who work in Austria.

- **Eli Chavez**, of the Province of Rio, pointed out the challenges to community life: differences in works, geographical dispersion of local communities, differences of outlook, and a tendency to individualism in the post-modern world. The province is growing older and the number of confreres is diminishing. It is now at work at giving itself new life: a provincial action plan which would serve as a reference point for local community plans, a revision of works, more Vincentian works in the service of the poor, a new orientation for the administration of our funds to better serve the poor, a proposal for our formation programs, and better care of aged and sick confreres.

- **Urban Osuji**, the Vice-Visitor of Nigeria, regularly visits his local communities. These visits reinforce good relations among the confreres and let the Visitor see the confreres, talk over the problems of the local communities with them, and involve them in making needed decisions. He is also careful to observe how the community prays. Many meetings have been proposed. The superiors meet four times a year; the formators, each month. Each local community sets aside at least one evening a week to relax together. Faith sharing is successful especially for the students, who are more at ease with this than are the priests.

- **Bernard Quinn** spoke with us about the canonical visitations of the Province of the West of the United States. They are very effective in animating local communities, and the confreres appreciate them. A member of his council goes with him and this allows a more objective view of the local community. Those confreres

who wish can meet the Visitor in private. The program for the visit is based on what the confreres actually experience and on the problems that they want to discuss. The canonical visitation is also a time to see the places where the confreres work and to meet with those who exercise pastoral responsibility there.

After the evening meal, two experiences of prayer in common were proposed to us. We could choose between *lectio divina* presented by **Paul Roche** and evaluation of our lives, presented by **A. Sad Budianto**.

Saturday 9

Jorge Pedroza presided at the common Eucharist.

Two conferences and group sessions were the work for the morning. **Santiago Azcárate** talked to us about "*The Vincentian community, a community for the mission*" and **Józef Kapuściak** "*The Vincentian local superior*."

In the first afternoon session, the reports from the groups were presented, and they dealt with four themes:

- *Community life*: many provinces today have small local communities. Should they be modeled on the large local communities of the past? The **Superior General** might present some reflections and directions on the community of apostolic life in the Congregation.

- *The Practical Guide for the Superior*: without neglecting the juridical part, there should be more criteria to help guide the spiritual and missionary orientation for which everyone is looking. This "guide" should take into account the variety of local communities, or at least it should be able to be adapted for the conditions of each province.

- *Formation*: Young people should be initiated into the values of community life. Provincial, or interprovincial, meetings should be seen as times for formation. The various meetings of confreres should allow a deepening of the communitarian dimension. Experiences of community life could be shared in *Vincentiana*. The wish of the **Superior General** for the animation of local communities through his letters and reflections based on the lived realities of local communities was also mentioned.

- *The community plan*: this is a vital instrument for community life. When local communities draw it up, they should take into account the provincial plan. A periodic evaluation is necessary so that the community plan not become a dead letter. Perhaps it would be good if there were in each province some confreres trained to help the communities in drawing up their local plan. Some plans could serve as models to be published in *Vincentiana*.

As on the previous evening, two experiences of community prayer were offered us at the end of the day: a Christian reading of reality, with **Simão Valenga** and a meditation that promotes fraternal life, with **Giancarlo Passerini**.

Monday 11

Sunday, the Lord's Day, was a free day, set aside for rest and relaxation of everyone, including this chronicler.

Józef Łucyszyn opened the week by presiding at the common celebration of the Eucharist.

The moderator explained to us the direction of this second week: the international dimension of the C.M. and collaboration among provinces. We began this theme by having a panel on the international missions.

– **Hugh O'Donnell** presented some information about the *Ratio Missionum* that the General Assembly of 1998 asked the Superior General to draw up. The document has not yet been finished. It tries to be faithful to the spirit of the C.M., namely a disposition to go to the ends of the earth for the salvation of souls and the good of the neighbor (St. Vincent). The Constitutions emphasize the mission "*ad gentes*." The General Assembly of 1992 asked for a mission in Albania to be opened, and the final document ended with these words: "... to the ends of the earth, even to China." After that Assembly, more than 50 confreres have responded to the calls of the Superior General, and international missions have been founded in Albania, the Solomon Islands, China, El Alto in Bolivia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Siberia, Ukraine, Rwanda, Burundi and Cuba.

He also talked to us about the China mission, opened at the initiative of the Superior General, made possible thanks to the generosity of other provinces. An international community has been formed, and for the first time, confreres from Asia have entered China and now participate in the mission in that country.

– **Giuseppe Guerra** then talked about the international mission of *Rrëshen*, in Albania. The confreres there come from the three Italian provinces. Poland had sent one confrere, now in the mission of the Solomon Islands. They work with the Daughters of Charity, who have a nursery school, a dispensary, and they also catechize. Juridically, the mission has been confided to the Province of Naples but collaboration among the three Italian provinces is very close. It has now been established as the "Albanian Region" with a regional superior named by the Superior General. Albania is a poor country. The mission was opened in the north of the country, where Catholics are in the majority, but 50 years of Communism have not helped the Christian life. The catechetical formation of the laity is an important

goal. A seminary/apostolic school has been opened. The mission is bearing fruit.

– Confreres from Poland are represented on all the continents, and the Visitor, **Bronisław Sieńczak** can say, as a king of Spain did, that “the sun never sets on my kingdom,” which extends from Taiwan to Bolivia and Haiti, passing through Siberia, Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Austria, Germany and France. Since 1976, Polish confreres have been working in Madagascar and Congo and the province has answered the calls of the Superior General to go to Albania, Bolivia, Haiti, and more recently to the Solomon Islands. The Province of Poland presently has two special concerns: 1. confreres who return from the mission and who do not want to join the province, perhaps because it seems too traditional to them; 2. how to help the new Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

– **Paul Roche**, the Vice-Visitor, introduced us to this new vice-province. It has five missions that used to depend on the Province of Poland. The vice-province includes several countries, and visas are needed to move around. Differences of languages and cultures, even in our local communities, are also a problem. The Catholic Church is a minority, and it can be suspected of proselytizing, or of profiting from the economic problems of these countries. The vice-province does not have its own financial resources, and needs confreres from other provinces.

– **Victor Bieler** then shared some news about the international mission of the Solomon Islands, a very poor country with conflicts among different tribes. The Congregation works in an interdiocesan major seminary. The country has many islands and communications are difficult.

In all these international missions, inculturation is a must. We not only have to give, but we also have to receive the riches of the people and of their culture. What binds us is a relation of reciprocity.

The second morning session was consecrated to the Vincentian Family. **Benjamín Romo** presented this to us and pointed out the challenges to be met today, such as the project on the fight against hunger currently being developed. Following this presentation, the issue of groups who want to be “Vincentian” but who do not belong to known branches of the Family was brought up.

During the two afternoon sessions, **John Rybolt** gave us some information about the *International Formation Center* (C.I.F.) and **José María Nieto**, the Secretary General, discussed the “*The road taken by the Conferences of Visitors*.” All day Tuesday and Wednesday were given over to these Conferences of Visitors.

Tuesday 12 - Wednesday 13

The Conferences of Visitors worked, and your chronicler will take a rest by simply listing them: APVC (Asia/Pacific), CEVIM (Europe/Middle East), CLAPVI (Central and South America), COVIAM (Africa/Madagascar), CUSAV (USA).

Thursday 14

The Conferences of Visitors answered three questions about the outcomes of the conclusions of the General Assembly of 1998 concerning the life of the provinces and of local communities.

– *the challenges*: confreres are increasingly aware of the widening circle of poverty. The phenomenon of immigration is growing.

Awareness of the need of a new evangelization is very strong. This implies looking for a new language of faith and a stronger direction in truly Vincentian and missionary ministries in service of the poor.

– *the convictions*: The evangelization of the poor calls, on our part, for a genuine closeness and resolute dedication in the fight against different types of poverty and their causes. Actions are undertaken, formation programs are set up to analyze the root causes, and a conscientious and responsible laity is being formed, all to allow the poor to become agents of their own development.

– *the commitments*: everywhere we see the will to have a better knowledge of the Vincentian Family, and a genuine collaboration through setting up common plans and programs for formation. In some countries, a national council of the Vincentian Family has been set up.

The various groups in the Vincentian Family should develop as equals. We find that the confreres are often asked to handle their formation, but other groups could also be our formators.

In the second morning session, a panel presented a reflection on interprovincial and international collaboration in the area of formation. This reflection was carried on in a context of internationalization or globalization, with, at the same time, a strong regionalist or even nationalist current.

– **Alfonso Berrade** presented the common Internal Seminary of the provinces of Argentina, Chile and Peru. The experience has been positive. It lets young people discover more fully the international dimension of the Congregation, and become enriched by encountering others. This opens the door to a future interprovincial collaboration and to a sharing of missionaries. The experience likewise has limits, especially regarding the feeling of belonging to a province. Should this be planned for all stages of formation? A lengthy presence of young

confreres in another country would not support the discovery of their own province, nor its missionary work or a familiarity with the other confreres. It is certainly preferable to plan sharing of young confreres for a longer or shorter period.

– **Maurice Sullivan** talked about the meetings of formators in the Asia/Pacific region. The number of students is rising in this region. The most recent catalogue lists 169 of them. Three meetings of formators took place in the Philippines, Indonesia and India. They are planned for every 18 months in January or July. The formators give positive evaluations. The sharing of experiences and of questions with other formators is beneficial. They have especially been able to clarify the respective roles of the director, the spiritual director, and the teachers of the students.

– **Manuel González** talked to us about the formation meetings organized in Central and South America (CLAPVI). These periods of sharing and deepening of experiences took place in three areas: Central America-Mexico-the Caribbean (Spanish); South America (Spanish), and Brazil (Portuguese). They lasted two weeks and always had the same dynamic: a human reflection during the first week, and a Vincentian reflection in the second week. Each aspect of the theme presented is studied in its three dimensions: human, spiritual and pastoral. The results of the evaluation in these three areas are very positive, and the confreres want them to continue.

– **José María López Maside** presented the theme of collaboration with the Vincentian Family in the area of formation. Its goal is knowledge and deepening of the Vincentian identity. The creation of the CEME publishing office favors this project, as well as does the important effort made by the C.M. provinces of Spain to prepare good specialists and formators in Vincentian spirituality and in the pastoral field. New paths of collaboration have been opened up: the Vincentian Weeks in Salamanca, since 1972, have as a general theme “Vincent de Paul, the continuity of a Founder”; the summer courses at Salamanca that offer a cycle of three years of Vincentian studies for the Daughters of Charity, and of five years for Vincentian students; the Congress of the Vincentian Family; the publication of Vincentian materials and their availability in Vincentian educational centers; the systematic incorporation of Vincentian laity in popular mission teams; formation programs proper to each group.

We left All Hallows College at the beginning of the afternoon. We were divided into two groups, without knowing exactly why. The secretaries, the translators and the moderators went to visit the diocesan major seminary, some 60 km. from Dublin. The Superior General, his council and the Visitors had a meeting at 4:00 p.m. with the President of Ireland. We first visited St. Peter’s parish where our

confreres presented two Vincentian projects: one for refugees and the other for the Travelers. And then we left for the presidential palace, where the President of Ireland received us with simplicity, gentleness and humor. She welcomed and said hello to each one, and then offered us coffee and cookies. We visited the reception rooms and the museum that traces the history of the Republic of Ireland. Numerous camera flashes will immortalize this event.

Friday 15

The first morning session was devoted to a panel presentation about interprovincial and international collaboration in the areas of mutual aid, financial aid and twinning.

– **Elmer Bauer**, the Treasurer General, introduced this panel and made two important points: 1. the need to have a precise contract regarding financial aid and/or personnel, since Visitors and their councils change and their words can be lost while what they write remains; 2. the need for provinces that receive gifts to acknowledge them when they are received and give some information about how they are used.

– **Gabriel Naranjo** is the Visitor of a province that for several years, as elsewhere in Colombia, has enjoyed a vocational boom, with an average of six ordinations each year. Sixty confreres have been ordained or have taken vows in the last ten years. The province has been listening to the calls of the Congregation, and has sent confreres to many countries on all continents. For the last ten years, it has sent two students yearly to the Province of Toulouse. They learn French, finish their courses at the Institut Catholique of Paris and then work for three years in the Province of Toulouse. This experience will continue, but young priests will be sent, as the recent Provincial Assembly asked. The sending of confreres reinforces the awareness of the international character of the C.M. and the missionary sense of the province. The province receives these many vocations as a gift that it should share. On the financial level, the province can meet currently only 30% of its needs. Thus it needs to be helped today to become financially self-sufficient tomorrow.

– **Christian Sens** pointed out that the Province of Toulouse helps financially several provinces, or responds to requests because it can. And in the measure that it can, it considers that it must do so. This is a way of living out our solidarity. Welcoming students from Colombia and, in a lesser way, from Chile is a very rich experience for the province. The meeting of cultures and the discovery of different experiences allow openness and permits, beginning in the years of formation, some experience of the international dimension of the Congregation. This is a richness for the local communities that receive them after ordination. Their presence also reveals poverty and

invites us to humility. France, the "eldest daughter of the Church," has become a mission country. In the past it sent out missionaries, while today, it receives missionaries from another continent.

George Weber and **John Ranasingh** presented the experience of "twinning." An agreement was drawn up between the Southern Province of the United States and the North Indian province. The North Indian province has numerous vocations and slim financial resources; the American province has the reverse. The goal of this agreement is the evangelization of the poor. The American province agreed to send confreres for a short period to give retreats and to bring some help in Vincentian formation. The Indian province is putting confreres at the disposition of the American province for longer periods, especially for missions. The financial help from the American province is going to establish gradually a fund that will belong to the Indian province at the time of its 25th anniversary of foundation, in 2022.

Thanks to **Félix Álvarez** we discovered two Spanish associations, COVIDE et AMVE. The Visitatrixes and Visitors of Spain have established a non-governmental organization, COVIDE (Vincentian Cooperation for Development). The goals of this organization are: to raise funds for development projects in the Third World; education and awareness programs for the missionary cause and the sending of volunteers/lay missionaries to developing countries; and evangelization. AMVE (Spanish Vincentian Missionary Action) is an organization through which the Spanish provinces of the Daughters of Charity and of the Congregation, in relation with the entire Vincentian Family, take their place in the universal Church's missionary activity "ad gentes," as seen in the thought of Vincent de Paul. Its goal is to animate and give life to the Vincentian missionary activity of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity of Spain in developing countries and the mission territories where they are sent. Information and formation are also a part of its objectives.

Following this panel, several other experiences of mutual help or exchange of confreres were shared in the meeting.

In the second morning session, **Thomas McKenna** told us about the study undertaken in the U.S.A. in view of a reconfiguration of the provinces. The goal can only be a better response to the challenge posed by the evangelization of the poor.

Elmer Bauer gave us some information on the web page of the Vincentian Family, during the first afternoon session.

The second afternoon session was a time for free discussion with the Superior General and the members of his council. I will report here just a few points.

– Investigations are currently underway with other organizations such as the United Nations, the FAO, the European Community, and other Congregations. At the conclusion of these investigations, it will certainly be possible to name someone who could help the Visitors in developing their requests for funds from these organizations for the accomplishment of their plans.

– Currently, the requests for help in building are quite numerous. The mission funds at the Curia are not large enough to be the primary source of financing. These funds, however, can help formation plans or can support a mission. Help for building plans should come from other provinces or organizations.

– “Aid to the Church in Need” grants study scholarships, but it limits the number granted to the same province. Other organizations also grant scholarships.

– Two confreres represent the C.M. at the United Nations, an enormous bureaucracy. They have to learn patience and find the best contacts that will allow them to navigate up through the different levels of participation. At present, our two confreres have access to the second level, which allows them to participate in committees.

– A meeting of the Miraculous Medal Association will take place next October in Rome. Its Statutes have been reviewed and approved by the Holy See. The Association has about 6,000,000 members and is growing in various new areas. It presents a popular dimension to Marian spirituality, and its object is the evangelization of the poor, especially poor families.

– When asked about his relationships with the Holy See, **Fr. Maloney** answered that they are not very frequent. On the contrary, the Procurator General and the Postulator often go the Vatican. The Holy See allows great liberty.

Other meetings are more frequent. The major superiors of men meet twice a year, and the societies of apostolic life also have meetings. Other groups also exist in Rome, such as for treasurers general, assistants general, archivists, multi-media groups, and the international Justice and Peace organization.

– The book on Vincentian spirituality for the laity is being prepared. Its publication is a little bit behind schedule.

– With the year 2004 in mind, **Fr. Maloney** explained his favorite plans: drawing up a Guide for the Local Superior; stabilizing the new international missions by putting them under a province, and giving them a solid financial basis; planning for the international mission in Chicago requested by the archbishop; propagating the Miraculous Medal Association in several more countries; providing greater stability for the Vincentian Marian Youth and for MISEVI.

He also announced the publication of a document for the provinces concerning financial management. It should appear shortly.

The evening meal was festive. The water served each day was changed into wine. The party went on quite late in the evening, and we were all singing in various languages. This was an important moment in our brotherhood, and showed that the next day would be our last working day.

Saturday 16

The Visitors gave their personal evaluations of the whole meeting, and offered their opinion of themes proposed by the groups for the next General Assembly. They are numerous: revision of the Statutes; a new reading of the Constitutions at the beginning of this third millennium; and several themes concerning formation, community for the mission, and evangelization of the poor today. The time then arrived for thanks, which **Fr. Maloney** gave to those men and women who helped with this meeting and to all its participants.

Fr. Maloney then presided over the concluding Eucharist. It was also time for sending us on mission, and for the return to our respective provinces.

(JOHN RYBOLT, C.M., translator)

Meeting of the Visitors: “Animation of the Local Communities”

All Hallows College - Dublin, 4-16 June 2001

Questionnaire on the Local Communities. Synthesis of the Responses to the Requests Made to the Visitors

Methodology used

- Each item (idea) mentioned in the Visitor's report is counted as one instance; thus, the number cited in the synthesis pertains to the number of times an item or an idea similar or closely connected to it is mentioned.
- The items are grouped according to themes (e.g., relative to ministry, relationship, structure, or other).
- The synthesis presents only the main points taken up in the survey.
- More detailed information on the items is found in the Collated Responses Sheets.

Respondents: 40 out of 50 Provinces and Vice-Provinces

1. On Question no. 1: Positive experiences in the local community

- 1.1 The area where most of the comments (92 out of 215) are made concerns structured community activities, like
 - Prayer in common (25);
 - House meetings (15);
 - Common recreation (11);
 - Less formal structure (8);
 - Community plans (7);
 - Common meals (7).

- 1.2 The area coming second is the matter of relationship (66)
 - Supportive, trustworthy, respectful, understanding community (32);
 - Concern for each, friendliness, mutual assistance, sensitivity to those in difficulty (25).
- 1.3 On the area of ministry, the following items (31) are brought up
 - Teamwork in ministry (11);
 - Dedication to the work of the Gospel (8);
 - Sharing and planning pastoral activities (7).
- 1.4 From another perspective, by the number of times mentioned in general, the items considered most positive are
 - Support, trust, understanding in a community (32);
 - Prayer in common (25);
 - Concern for each, friendliness, etc. (25).
- 1.5 Significant items mentioned but outside of the main themes are
 - Vincentian identity (6);
 - Help from outside people (5);
 - Diversity in community (4);
 - Wisdom and good example of older confreres (4).

2. On Question no. 2: Difficulties in the local community

- 2.1 Most often mentioned item has to do with relationships (78 out of 222)
 - Individualism, self-sufficiency (30);
 - Lack of understanding or tolerance, superficial relationship (26);
 - Eccentric or difficult confreres (8).
- 2.2 Second item often mentioned concerns the ministry (44)
 - Difficulties in scheduling community activities (18);
 - Deficiencies in the ministry, such as lack of pastoral plan, team-work, availability, etc. (16).
- 2.3 Third item has to do with differences in
 - Age or generation (16);
 - Culture (11);
 - Mentality, perspectives, personalities (10).

N.B. These items may in fact have implications on relationship. That is why with these items, the area of relationship may be even more highlighted as source of difficulty for community members.

- 2.4 On the area of structure, the items (35) include
 - Isolation of some confreres in the mission (8);
 - Big community seen as difficult for community spirit (6);
 - No local plans (6);
 - Inadequate participation in common activities (5).
- 2.5 From another perspective, by rank of highest incidence, the most important items often mentioned are
 - Individualism (30);
 - Lack of mutual understanding and tolerance (26);
 - Scheduling difficulties (18);
 - Differences in age and generation (16);
 - Deficiencies in the ministry (16).
- 2.6 A significant item mentioned in the “Others,” but somewhat related to “differences in age and generation” is
 - Growing old of confreres and its implication on the ministerial commitments (8).

3. On Question no. 3: Hopes and dreams about community life

- 3.1 Items on relationship and structures are most often mentioned (48 each out of 203). On relationship, the following stand out
 - Support, concern, and respect for one another (19);
 - Unity in diversity, understanding of differences (13);
 - The local community as a home of welcome (9).On structures, the items are
 - Local plans and projects (9);
 - Flexible structures (7);
 - Preparation of the young members (6).
- 3.2 Hopes and dreams in general include 43 items. Among them
 - The local community's communion of life, goods, works, and interests; balance between the personal and the communal (13);
 - A truly Vincentian community way of life (7);
 - Commitment to our mission for the poor (7);

- Community as condition for integral ongoing Vincentian formation (6);
 - Community life grounded on social realities of today (5).
- 3.3 Some beliefs and attitudes are frequently mentioned (40)
- Co-responsibility and collaboration (12);
 - Local community as place of prayer (9);
 - Communities united by Christ in the mission for the poor (8);
 - Common purpose in our work (7).
- 3.4 An observation: the themes are mentioned in almost equal numbers. This seems to show the balanced perspective in regard to our hopes and dreams for the local communities. Each important area is covered.
- 3.5 Items not under the direct category above but in “Others” are significant in that they revolve around an implicit theme: the future of the local community/Congregation. Items mentioned are
- Local community as attractive to the young confreres (5);
 - More vocations for the Congregation (5);
 - Openness to the Vincentian Family and lay people (5);
 - Possibilities for affiliated laity (4).
- 4. On Question no. 4: Means to achieve the dreams and ideals of community life**
- 4.1 Majority of the items center around structures or structured activities (97 out of 186)
- Formulating a realistic community plan (16);
 - A process involving reflection and evaluation (14);
 - Intensifying community prayer and other spiritual activities (14);
 - Continuing formation (13);
 - Holding more community gatherings (11);
 - Communication among confreres and communities (11);
 - Regular meetings (9).
- 4.2 Second area in the number of items mentioned refers to relationship (29), which includes
- Acceptance of each other’s limitations and differences (16);
 - Being a community of friends (5);
 - Overcoming individualism (4).

- 4.3 Items on leadership are also brought up (25)
 - The Superior plays an important role (12);
 - The Visitor should make more visits (4).
- 4.4 Some attitudes and beliefs are also mentioned as important means (21). Among these are
 - Faithfulness to our rules and Constitutions and our Vincentian vocation (10);
 - Understanding the sources of our problems (7).
- 4.5 As in question no. 3, the "Others" include
 - Inviting young people to join our communities, working with youth, cultivating vocations (5);
 - Collaboration with the laity, and other members of the Vincentian Family (5).

5. On Question no. 5: Aspects to be emphasized in the Visitors' Meeting

- 5.1 Of 146 items, the majority touch on structures (56)
 - Community prayer (18);
 - Community plan/project/covenant (14);
 - Communication and dialogue (10).
- 5.2 The next area refers to beliefs and attitudes (45)
 - Co-responsibility in the ministry, team-ministry (12);
 - Vincentian community life and charism (9);
 - Distinction between what is mine and what is the community's (4);
 - Integration of spiritual life and pastoral work (4);
 - Formative aspect of community life (4).
- 5.3 On the area of relationships (17), the items include
 - Friendship and fraternal communication among confreres (14);
 - Spirit of welcome and hospitality (2).
- 5.4 Items on leadership are also mentioned (14)
 - The role of the Superior (5);
 - Sensitivity in choosing and assigning confreres (3).

5.5 Other items not under the categorised theme include

- Openness to lay people (4);
- Age-problem (4);
- Inter-provincial exchange (4).

Manuel Ginete, C.M.
Quezon City - Philippines
May 2001

Homily of the Superior General for the Opening of the Visitors' Meeting

Readings: Tobit 1:1-2; 2:1-9; Matthew 12:1-12

Today's first reading ends like a chapter in a Dickens' novel. It leaves us hanging in suspense, awaiting the next installment: "I went to sleep," Tobit says, "and because of the heat I left my face uncovered."

Of course, having read the book, we all know what happens next. A bird, responding to the call of nature, lets his droppings fall right in Tobit's eyes and he is blinded.

But in introducing this rather jarring story, the author has already made the theme of the Book of Tobit very clear: the just man loves the law of the Lord and he loves the poor. The Book of Tobit is filled with many other interesting themes. In fact, it has a little bit of something for everyone. It theologizes about civil disobedience to unjust laws. It talks about the sufferings of the just. It offers wonderful instructions to married couples like Tobiah and Sarah, and it speaks continually about providence, symbolized by the presence of Raphael all during the journey of the young Tobiah. But the principal themes are love of the law of the Lord and love of the poor. As we begin this Visitors' Meeting, let me say a word about these two themes as they refer to the life of a Visitor.

Love of the law of the Lord. The new law of the Lord for us is the good news of Jesus, though St. Paul tells us it is not an external law binding us in, but an internal law, the power of God liberating us to go out of ourselves. Perhaps too we could say — though it is by no means on the same level — that our Constitutions and Statutes are the law of the Lord for us. I encourage you as Visitors to make both these sources — the good news of God's presence in Jesus and our own Constitutions and Statutes — the substantial food that you share with the confreres. St. Vincent says that the word of Jesus never fails. If the houses of the Congregation are built upon it, they can sustain any tempest. The winds may blow, the rains may fall, the floods may rise but the house stands because it is built upon rock. And our Constitutions and Statutes are in a sense a modern-day concretization of what the Lord is asking of us as members of the

Congregation: they describe what works we should pursue, what our life together should be like, what our spirituality is, what our vows commit us to, and, in juridical matters, how the Congregation works, what the processes are by which decisions for the present and the future are made. I encourage you as Visitors to make these two founts the source of your own spirituality. The Lord calls you and me to be animators in the Congregation of the Mission. And in order to animate well, we ourselves must be filled with the Spirit of the Lord like Tobit. We must love the Lord's law, which for us surely is the scriptures and, I suggest too, we must absorb the spirit of our Constitutions and Statutes.

Secondly, the Book of Tobit teaches that the just man loves the poor. "My son," Tobit says in this first chapter, "go out and try to find a poor man. Bring him back with you so that he can share this meal with me." Of course, on the deepest level, that is what the vocation of a Visitor and a Superior General is all about. In a way, we are always saying to the confreres: "My brother, go out and find a poor person. Find the poorest of the poor. Bring them to the human table so that they might find food to nourish their bodies, and bring them to the table of the Lord's word and of the Eucharist so that they might find nourishment too for their spirit." It is essential, in the midst of all of our other activities and concerns — supporting and running the houses of formation, examining budgets, caring for the aged confreres, intervening in emergencies — it is essential in the midst of all of these concerns, that these words of Tobit direct everything we say or do. "My brother, go out and find a poor person." This is the purpose of our formation. It is the purpose of the buildings we build. It is, as our Constitutions tell us, the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission. The Lord calls us to find the poor and proclaim the good news of God's presence and love to them.

So, my brothers, I encourage you as we begin these two weeks together, let the word of God nourish you. Let our Constitutions nourish you. Let the poor nourish you. The Visitor needs this nourishment just as much, perhaps even more, than the confreres he serves. So, use this time to be nourished. Pray with one another. Share the scriptures and the Eucharist with each other each day with peace and joy. Listen to one another well. Relax too and enjoy each other's company. Let the Lord speak to you. He says today: Love my word. Love your own Constitutions and Statutes. And he encourages you to say to every confrere again and again: "Go find a poor person." In fact, let that be the underlying theme that motivates everything that you do as Visitor.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

4.VI.2001

On Building a Healthy Ecosystem in Community

by Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General

4.VI.2001

High above the mountain ranges of the Western United States glides the California condor, the largest bird in North America, with a wingspan of nine feet. It soars to an altitude of three miles, swooping down from time to time to feed on red meat and salmon with a healthy appetite. With its black body, bare head and red knees, this majestic bird has flown through the mountains and valleys of California, Nevada and Arizona for millennia. But by 1990 only 23 remained in existence, 6 in California and 17 near the Grand Canyon in Arizona. It was an endangered species.

Every species needs its own peculiar ecological system in order to survive. When that system is rich, the species thrives. As its ecosystem deteriorates, the species gradually diminishes and, in the worst cases, finally becomes extinct. Millions of species that once inhabited the planet earth are now extinct. So too will it be one day for the human race. Will its ecosystem be destroyed by a violent cataclysm of human making, a massive bomb? Will it be destroyed when a giant asteroid crashes into the planet? Will it be destroyed because a polluted environment gradually suffocates the human person? Who knows?

And religious life? Life in the Congregation of the Mission? Nature teaches us the simple lesson that we will grow and flourish only to the extent that the ecosystem created by St. Vincent 376 years ago and renewed from time to time in our history is vibrant. Otherwise we will decline and perhaps one day even disappear.

A) The Theme of this Meeting

The theme of this meeting is "Animating Local Communities." To animate means to give life, breath, soul, spirit. The Lord calls each of us here today to be an animator — me and the members of the General Curia, on the level of the worldwide Congregation; you

who are Visitors, in your provinces — and he calls each of the local superiors in each of our houses to be an animator of the men with whom he lives. This is no easy task. In fact, it is an enormous challenge. Two pieces of data highlight for me the critical nature and the magnitude of this challenge; one is existential, the other juridical.

The existential datum. About 300 confreres between the ages of 35 and 50 have now passed through the three-month Vincentian Ongoing Formation program at CIF in Paris. Fr. John Rybolt, who has been in charge of the program from the beginning, has often told me that the concern most frequently expressed by these confreres is an uneasiness about community living. They sense that something is lacking in our life together. In the last three decades, most of our provinces have taken significant steps forward in the renewal of our apostolic life. Little by little the Congregation has focused more clearly on the poor and on our missionary nature. But many in the CIF program ask: Have we found the right formula for our life together? Does community provide the faith-support, the solidarity in action, the encouragement, the understanding, the home that so many today — especially the young — seek when they join an apostolic society? This uneasiness, expressed by so many confreres, is the challenging existential datum that I place before you today.

The second datum is juridical and it too is enormously challenging. Article 129 of our Constitutions states this: "The Congregation forms itself particularly in the individual local communities." That is where the Congregation really lives and grows — in the local community. That is where we are either happy or unhappy. That is where we either pray or do not pray. That is where we either feel support or do not feel it. That is where we either enjoy one another's company or flee from it. That is where we either plan and act in solidarity in serving the poor or merely park for the night at a convenient motel in order to go out again in the morning as a lone-ranger-type apostle. This juridical datum raises the urgent question: Can we make the local community a healthy ecosystem where confreres live, grow and thrive?

But there is more to this second datum. The second paragraph of Article 129 states: "The superior, as the center of unity and animator of the life of the local community, should promote the ministries of the house and, with the community, should be concerned for the personal development and activity of each confrere." This paragraph states how important the local superior's role is. He is the center of unity. He is a key animator in the local community. Of course, he is not alone. Others share this responsibility too. But, if the superior is good at the job, the chances are that the local community will be very much alive. And if he is bad at it, the local community will have considerable difficulty finding the *anima*, the breath that it needs in order to live healthily.

B) My hopes for this Meeting

What do I hope for from this meeting?

I hope, first of all, that we can devise ways of helping local superiors build, with the confreres, an ecosystem where their communities will thrive. Your provinces, of course, are different from one another; even within provinces, local communities are very varied. Some are large. Some are small. Some revolve around a single work. Some embrace multiple works. In my judgment, this meeting will be a success if we can put in the hands of local superiors, wherever they may be and whatever their houses may be like, tools that will help them construct a vibrant ecosystem in their local community.

That brings me to a critical problem and my second hope for this meeting. Our Constitutions (C. 27) and Statutes (S. 16) propose the community plan as the basic tool for structuring the life and activity of the local community. It is a covenant, so to speak, that we make with one another and in which we commit ourselves concretely to support each other in our apostolic labors, our life together, our prayer, our vows, our ongoing education, and in many other ways. But I have the impression — and this is the problem — that many local communities do not take the formulation, evaluation, and regular revision of the community plan seriously. During the visits that the Assistants General and I make to the provinces, we often note that local community plans are badly made or are merely an order of day. This is also one of the most frequent comments that you as Visitors make in the reports you send me about your visits to local houses. So, a second concrete result that I hope will issue from this meeting is this: that all of us, on the general level and on the provincial level, will take local community planning seriously and that we will help local superiors to do so too.

A third hope. Would it be possible for us to envision “A Practical Guide for Local Superiors” similar to the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*? Would it be possible to present in the Guide various models for community plans: for large communities, for small communities, for communities engaged in a single work, for communities engaged in dispersed works? Could such a “Practical Guide” offer guidelines to help superiors accompany the confreres, questions to pose when meeting with each one individually a few times a year and listening to his concerns? I would be very interested in discussing this possibility during our time here.

Over the last several years I have written three articles on the local community and local community planning. The most recent of these discusses various models of community. You will find it in your folder either in English, French, or Spanish. I ask you to read it in these days. It comes to about 15 pages. I hope that it will stimulate some thoughts for discussion during these days.

C) Five Community Moments

It is always important to speak about community concretely. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: "The person who loves his dream of community more than the real community itself destroys community."¹

Community exists when we live it concretely and vitally. Let me dwell briefly on five significant elements in the ecosystem of community living. They are, so to speak, the air, the water, the sun, the fire, the soil of local communities.

1. *Meals*

It might seem strange that I begin with eating, though of course the principal communal act that Jesus left his followers was precisely a meal. My focus, however, is not on food (though St. Vincent did encourage treasurers to serve good wine and good bread).² My focus is on common meals as one of the primary signs of union. When asked what are the most striking memories of their families, countless people respond by describing long festive dinners at Christmas or Easter in which people sat around the table telling stories, or a time together on vacation where everyone ate together, and relaxed, sang, played games, and talked until late into the night. Of course, not every meal can be that way. But meals are a prime time for good human communication. They are times when our tradition is deepened because we recall stories from the past and speak of wonderful men and women whom we have known. They are a time when that tradition is developed because new people express new insights and new ways of responding to the same values in the service of the poor.

Decades ago, reading at table occupied us during meals. Today meals are an opportunity for genuine, interested table-talk. But at times communities eat rapidly, with sparse conversation. In some houses, it is hard to get everyone together even for a single meal a day.

Crucial in the human conversation that characterizes meals is attentive listening. We must be deeply interested in one another, in our backgrounds, our histories, our gifts, the projects that set us on fire. Few things are worse than having an exciting experience to relate, bringing it up at table, and finding that no one seems eager to hear it. I regret to say that this often happens. A few weeks ago I found myself agitated by what I perceived to be an injustice done to a priest by a bishop. I tried to tell my story to two people. Both were

¹ D. BONHOEFFER, *Life Together* (London, 1954) 15.

² SV III, 505.

preoccupied with other things that day. When I was a short way into my story, each interrupted me to tell me his own story. In the end, I concluded that it was my turn to listen, but I never got my story out that day.

Of course, the Eucharistic meal plays a most significant role in our lives. It is a time for attentive listening to the word of God, for genuine sharing in faith, and for union in the life of the Lord. Some of my striking memories in community have been wonderful Eucharistic celebrations. That brings me to the second community moment.

2. Prayer

Here let me mention three distinctive moments.

a) Our common liturgical prayer. It is very important that it be prepared well and celebrated beautifully and meditatively. If so, it can be a most significant means of our contact with God, with one another, and with young people who hunger to pray with us. It can be a time when we cry out:

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to make music to your name, O most High,
to proclaim your love in the morning
and your truth in the watches of the night.³*

b) Faith sharing. This is one of the contemporary forms that the traditional "repetition of prayer" is taking.⁴ It can be a powerful moment in building community if the members are capable of sharing their faith with great simplicity. Faith sharing is not meant to be a homily prepared ahead of time, nor is it meant to be a catharsis for releasing one's pent-up anxieties, but rather it is a spontaneous expression of our hopes, our doubts, our joys, our pain as we live and pray before the Lord. If we wrestle with life and share with one another to make sense of who we are and what we are called to in the light of the gospel, I am confident that we will come to know and appreciate one another in a much deeper way.

c) Mental prayer. Mental prayer can seem a rather solitary exercise, but as Vincentians we promise to engage in it *together* in order to support one another in reflecting on God's word and in contemplating his presence. Personally, I sense that support very much, I am encouraged when I find myself meditating with my brothers. Conversely, I am quite discouraged when I find myself

³ Ps 92:2-3.

⁴ C. 46.

alone in the chapel, wondering where everybody else is. If the liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed,"⁵ mental prayer is one of the key foundation stones. It nourishes and strengthens our faith. It is important, therefore, that the members of local communities encourage each other in meditating.

Often, in small communities, confreres say that it is almost impossible for them to pray together because of their fewness in number and their multiple works. I am very much in disagreement with that conclusion. I realize, of course, that the prayer of a small community cannot be the same as that of a large community. But even in small communities, we must pray together. If we do not find the time to do so, we are lost.

3. *Fun*

If prayer is the human heart searching for God, humor helps us to realize that God is unpredictable, as are most of us, his creatures!

Humor is linked to our perception of incongruity. There is lots that is incongruous in our lives, if only we can see it with a little bit of distance.

It is very important to have fun in community. Fun fosters harmony by preventing us from being overly serious about ourselves. Just as it is important that the community work together, so also it is important that it relax together and laugh from time to time, that we enjoy one another's company. In that way, we will see different aspects of each other's personality too.

Aquinas says a striking thing about playfulness: "Unmitigated seriousness betokens a lack of virtue, because it wholly despises play which is as necessary for a good human life as is rest."⁶ You remember, I am sure, the letter in which St. Vincent told St. Louise to lighten up and have some fun when she was in the company of the good-humored Madame Goussault.⁷

A local community should be creative in organizing times of diversion. I lived in a house where once a week, at night, we watched a videotape of a movie together. Actually, we now do this from time to time in the General Curia. We agreed on the film ahead of time. Somebody prepared a few snacks, and we sat around and talked about it afterwards. I loved it, and so did everybody else. Nobody had to come, but everybody did.

⁵ *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 10.

⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, iv ib 854.

⁷ SV I, 502.

I lived in a community in Panama where we came together every Monday in order to pray together, to have a meeting, and then to enjoy the rest of the day in one another's company. Almost nobody on the mission ever missed that day.

There are many other possibilities, but it is very important that we enjoy each other's company, laugh, relax, and at times simply have fun.

4. Meetings

Even though meetings are sometimes a scourge in our lives, or as I have suggested elsewhere, one of the contemporary forms of mortification, nonetheless, they are a very important community moment. They are a time when much important communication takes place. They should be a moment in which everyone feels included, in which people feel a common responsibility for the values being shared and the decisions being made.

I suggest that two meetings are of particular importance:

a) The meeting for formulating the local community plan.⁸ Unfortunately, as I have already mentioned, many houses still do this very poorly. They tend to make it more like an occasion for deciding on an order of day, rather than a time for creativity. They are slow to exercise the flexibility that the Constitutions and Statutes provide. But the meeting for formulating the local community plan can be precisely the time in which the ecosystem that I am describing can be created, developed, enriched, and covenanted. I encourage you as provincial leaders to make one of your priorities in the coming year assistance to local communities in developing their plans.

b) Meetings for evaluation or *revision de vie*.⁹ We seek ongoing communal conversion within community. Evaluation times give us an opportunity to reflect on our mission and on our lifestyle. It is important that we do this honestly and peacefully. Such meetings can be the time for many suggestions that can be helpful for the growth of a local community. The key point is often balance, the ability to integrate various values: mission, prayer, life together.

Essential in our lives is simple dialogue, the ability to draw out from others their feelings and thoughts, to pose helpful questions, to give one's own reaction without being either defensive or aggressive.

⁸ C. 27; S. 16.

⁹ C. 2; 22; 27; S. 16.

5. *Apostolate*

We are an apostolic *society*. Our apostolate, therefore, has a communal dimension. I encourage you to assist local superiors to plan in common with the confreres, to evaluate in common, and actually to animate the confreres to work as a team in their apostolates as much as possible. There are few things that tie us together more than cooperating in an exciting common apostolic project. It is wonderful when, in a healthy sense, we are proud of what we do in a mission or in a seminary or in a parish or a soup kitchen or a social justice program.

There are many ways of showing apostolic solidarity. Do we listen to what our brothers have done during the day when, coming home tired, they want to chat with us in the evening? Do we let them share with us the challenges they meet in their apostolates? Do we pray for and with our brothers in their apostolates? Can our community truly be called an "apostolic *community*"? Or is it more a hotel? Common interest in the works in which each member of the local community is involved is a powerful unifying force.

A final word. Not every community will renew itself and attain the ideals envisioned by our Constitutions and Statutes or expressed at this meeting. A provincial and his council have the difficult task of working toward the gradual renewal of the local communities. As you do that, I ask you to assign younger confreres only to those communities that engage in a serious process of renewal. It is those communities that will carry the seeds for future Vincentian life. A province with three communities where the confreres live Vincentian life vitally has a real future. A province with 20 unrenewed communities where the confreres just survive is utterly stagnant. In fact, unless a province succeeds in building genuinely participative communities, it dies.

And the California condor? I am happy to report that in the last decade its number has increased from 23 to 120 (a good-sized province!). Those who love this majestic bird, recreated for it an ecosystem where it could live and even thrive. I hope we can do the same thing by building vibrant local Vincentian communities.

D) Questions for Reflection

1. What do you see as the greatest challenges today in animating the **local** communities in your province?
2. What are your concrete hopes for this meeting?
3. Are meals a time of genuine conversation in the houses of your province? Is there good listening among the confreres? Are they present for meals?

4. How would you evaluate the communal prayer of the houses of your province? Is it well prepared? beautiful? attractive to young people?
5. Do the confreres in the houses of your province enjoy each other's company? Do they at times have fun together? Are they creative in organizing times of diversion?
6. Do the local communities of your province really work together in formulating their community plan? Are they faithful in living it out? Are your local superiors good at animating house meetings?
7. Do the confreres in the houses of your province work **together**, or is their style more that of a lone-ranger? Do confreres living in the same house but working in diverse apostolates show genuine interest in one another's works?

The Theological Dimension of Community Life

by Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza, C.M.

Vicar General

8.VI.2001

The Church has a long tradition with many different types of community life. The varied experiences of life in common usually coincide in one fundamental element: all propose as a first objective the perfection of their members, while at the same time insisting on one or another particular end and on some characteristic virtues of the Institute. After the Protestant Reformation diverse traditional forms of community life continued to flourish, without stifling the appearance of new types, among which is found the Vincentian mode of community life. When St. Vincent designed the community of his missionaries he was not starting from zero. He implanted the elements needed from the diverse traditions of the common life: monastic, mendicant, and Jesuit, while adding at the same time original Vincentian elements. Thus the community life of the Congregation of the Mission would evolve in the function of the Mission, which is none other than the evangelization of the poor. Missioners living in community would be contemplatives in action and apostles in prayer.

1. Theological support of the Vincentian community

St. Vincent made use of, as we have said, elements referring to the common life already practiced in the traditions and constitutional texts of past and contemporary religious orders. Not satisfied with what he received from outside sources, he went a step farther to base the community life of his missionaries on solid theological foundations. To this end, he looked to the Word of God, and very particularly to the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is well-known that the imitation of Christ is a fundamental part of Vincentian spirituality. Imitation of the earthly Christ, even in insignificant details, offers Vincent de Paul doctrinal security even in those moments of making decisions in regard to practical living. St. Vincent would say "Christ's teaching will never let us down" (CR II, 1) and that "Jesus Christ is the true model and invisible guide on whom we must base our actions"

(SV XI, 212). He would frequently invite the missionaries to evaluate the practices and deeds of the ancient religious orders in regard to their common life, especially when these were based on the teachings of God's Word and the example of Jesus Christ and the early Christians.

It is here that St. Vincent finds authentic examples of community life of missionaries. Our Holy Founder, in his conferences, alludes to the Most Holy Trinity as the exemplary cause of community life in the community formed by Jesus and his disciples, which brought about the common life of the first Christian churches. St. Vincent saw in these biblical revelations a solid theological basis on which to rest the community life of the C.M.

2. Communities based on the example of the Trinity

St. Vincent reminds us that "according to the Bull which established our Congregation, we are bound to honor in a special way the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, mysteries beyond words" (CR X, 2). St. Vincent has frequent recourse to these two mysteries to draw out lessons and motivations of different types. For St. Vincent, the community life of the missionaries has its roots and basic reason for existence in the Holy Trinity. It was not in vain that God Three-in-One created all things and particularly the noblest among these: the human being, created in the image and likeness of God Three-in-One, which is to say, of God-Community of persons. A human being could not be realized except in relation to others, never separated from others. It behooves man, and in particular the Vincentian missionary, to live and relate to others in the image of the Trinity.

In contemplating the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, St. Vincent notes some practical applications for the common life. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect communion and reciprocity. As a consequence, the community of Vincentian missionaries must develop in a perfect communion of life and action. Remarking on the common life, Vincent would say, "God is One and in God there are three persons, without the Father being greater than the Son, nor the Son superior to the Holy Spirit" (SV XIII, 633). Thus, the missionaries, even when they are of great number, will nevertheless be of one heart and one soul.

God is a union of three persons from all eternity, now and forever, without limits of time, a union that perdures. Consequently, the community of missionaries will be an uninterrupted union, in every place and at every moment. Each of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity participates in the life of God. In the light of this principle, the community of missionaries must accept the value of participation and co-responsibility. Trinitarian love is altruistic and

generous, not possessive or selfish, lived among equals. So the Vincentian community will accept members who are basically equal in dignity, removed from manipulation and domination of some over others. To short, according to St. Vincent, the Vincentian community will be inspired by, and find an unmistakable model in, the common life of the Most Holy Trinity. Remarking on this concept in the conference of 23 May 1659, the saint told the missionaries: "Let us hold onto this spirit if we desire to be an image of the adorable Trinity, if we wish to maintain a holy union with the Father, with the Son, and with the Holy Spirit. What is it that creates that unity, that intimacy in God but the equality and distinction of the three persons?" (SV XII, 256-257).

On another occasion St. Vincent invoked the Most Holy Trinity as the foundation of the charitable mission of the Vincentian community. To this end he addressed the Daughters of Charity: "It would please me to see that the sisters, in this, be in conformity with the Most Holy Trinity: so just as the Father surrenders totally to the Son, and the Son totally to the Father, from which proceeds the Holy Spirit, in the same way the sisters would be totally one in producing works of charity... just like the Holy Trinity" (SV XIII, 633). In this way, according to St. Vincent, the Vincentian community must encourage imitation of the Trinity of God in a communion of love, for only thus will burgeon its proper mission which is nothing more than the compassionate love of neighbor.

Summing up, St. Vincent, following criteria of faith, sees in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity a truly exemplary source of the common life of the missionaries. Our Constitutions, keeping in mind the thought of St. Vincent, remind us that: "The Church finds the ultimate source of its life and action in the Trinity. The Congregation, within the Church, does the same" (C 20).

3. Community of Jesus with the apostles and the Vincentian Community

Israel, with the passage of time, developed a conscience and certain customs of community life. This conscience was expressed through a popular terminology: chosen people, priestly people and the rest of Israel. At the time of Jesus, there existed two contrary concepts of community. One part, naturally, was the united and close people of Israel, and the other was the people divided because of the influence of foreign powers. At the same time, autonomous and dissident groups arose: Samaritans, the monks of Qumran, and the group of John the Baptist. Jesus knew intimately and above all related with the group of John the Baptist.

a) *Jesus forms his own community*

The time came when Jesus broke with John the Baptist and formed his own community, a community with a particular tone and customs. Jesus, far from being an anchorite, preached the Beatitudes, sought relationships with people, and in general announced a joyful and liberating message. This announcement attracted a group of hearers disposed to follow him closely and to form a community in the strict sense of the word. The original nucleus was formed of the Twelve and in some way of a few others who, without pertaining to the Twelve, resembled them in their lifestyle. With all these Jesus formed a stable and itinerant community. It was different in that those who accepted Jesus' message continued to live in their respective dwellings.

b) *Features of Jesus' group*

According to gospel tradition, this group had some characteristic traits. First of all, the Apostles adhered to the person of Jesus, preferring him to any other family tie. It was an adhesion that continued to be purified and grew in authenticity as time passed. Another trait of the community of Jesus and the Apostles was its constant and explicit reference to God the Father. Jesus mentioned his Father continually and directed his prayer to him. In this way Jesus created a religious climate based on daily prayer to a provident and loving Father.

A third element enriched the community of Jesus and the Twelve: fraternity. Relationship within the group was not easy, given the variety of origins, temperaments, mentalities, and the personal aspirations of each one. Jesus accepted the Apostles as they were, with their differences, so he could remodel their souls and lead them slowly in communitarian and fraternal growth. Jesus respected the Apostles especially when they were experiencing group or personal problems. By personal example and his word he sowed new values in the group: fraternal love expressed in attitudes of service, personal and group humility, gratitude in mutual relationships, the significance of the cross, and confidence in God's Providence.

Another characteristic of the community of Jesus was its openness to mission. It was always ready for mission. It was not a closed ghetto. The community of Jesus and the populace met continually. Jesus and the Twelve traveled the roads of Palestine, entered the towns, and visited the synagogues. Jesus missioned personally in his free moments and at the same time sent his companions to mission to everyone without distinction. Jesus and his disciples used to go to Jerusalem to celebrate religious feasts. Even before the oft-repeated temptation of the setting up of three tents,

Jesus invited his disciples to open themselves to the four corners of the world. The community of Jesus and the Twelve was not an end in itself. The final outcome was that Jesus animated a community for the mission.

c) *Community and the Paschal Mystery*

Jesus and his community had some difficult moments. Many biblical scholars mention the crisis of Galilee (Jn 6:66-71) when not a few followers abandoned Jesus. But the real trial came with the persecution and Jesus' condemnation to death. In spite of their community experience at Jesus' side, the Twelve as a group crumbled: one betrayed Jesus, another denied him, the rest fled, and the group broke up. But in spite of this the seed sown by Jesus had not fallen on useless ground. Their encounter with the Resurrected Lord reunited the community, and they went forth together giving testimony to the resurrection.

d) *Application to the Vincentian community*

The community formed by Jesus and the Twelve is a perfect model of the Vincentian community. According to St. Vincent the members of the missionary community should be guided by the teachings and dynamisms proper to the community of Jesus and the Twelve. The Vincentian community will be all the more authentic as it more closely resembles the community of Jesus and his companions. On 14 November 1659, St. Vincent addressed the missionaries: "I beg the Company to praise God and to thank him for having placed us in the same state as his Son and the Apostles" (SV XII, 385). Our present Constitutions sum up the thought of St. Vincent in these words: the missionaries of the C.M. "follow Christ who called apostles and disciples and shared a fraternal life with them to evangelize the poor" (C 20, 2°).

4. The first Christian communities and the Vincentian Community

In a conference on Poverty, 6 August 1655, St. Vincent said to the missionaries: "What a blessing for the Mission to be able to imitate the first Christians, to live like them in common and in poverty! Oh Savior! Such an advantage for us! Let us beg God that in his mercy he grant us this spirit of poverty" (SV XI, 226). In the same conference our Holy Founder praises the common life of the first Christian communities, as well as mentioning some of their special qualities, such as the community of goods.

On 23 May 1659, St. Vincent quoted two biblical passages to the missionaries of Saint Lazare: "That with one accord you may with one

voice glorify God the Father" (Rom 15:6); "complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing" (Phil 2:2). And following this allusion to the Word of God, the saint concludes: "We must pray God that he make us all like the first Christians, of one heart and one soul" (SV XII, 249).

5. The first communities according to Acts

The book of Acts recounts the history of the expansion of the Word of God and the creation of new communities following the death and resurrection of the Lord. It was the followers of Jesus, changed by their Paschal experience, who formed these first communities. The spirit of the Risen Lord and the conviction that he lived and was the Messiah brought them to a new type of life. These first communities welcomed the Twelve, some relatives of Jesus, an undetermined group of former followers of Jesus, and some others who felt attracted by the example of the common life of the Christians. The first communities were open, little by little more complex, and in a constant process of differentiation from official Judaism.

In the Acts of the Apostles we find many examples of model Christian communities, fruit in good measure of historical recollection, and also partly from the tendency towards idealization. We refer to Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; and 5:12-16. St. Luke states that those who were baptized: "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need... praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47).

In these verses St. Luke summarily describes the life of the first Christian communities of Jerusalem and its surroundings, while at the same time he presents a valid model of the common life for the Church, and of course for the Vincentian community. The characteristic qualities of the first Christian communities are clearly shown in the quoted text:

- The members of the communities were moved to meet because of strong experiences of faith.
- The proclamation of the gospel by the Apostles was listened to with attention by both the baptized and the catechumens.
- Fraternal unity was manifested by the sharing of goods with the needy.

- Frequent shared prayer was part of their common life.
- The community met to celebrate the breaking of bread.
- The community was not elitist, opening its door to all without distinction.

Twenty centuries have passed since St. Luke penned the passage on which we have commented. Vincentians, beginning with St. Vincent, have always seen in these pages of Acts a model of community life. The Vincentian community will be authentic insofar as it is motivated by faith, shared by members of the community, in fraternal communion among all the confreres, in offering disinterested service and in sharing goods with the needy both within and outside the community, in prayer that, according to St. Vincent, "gives strength that animates us to serve God and the neighbor" (SV XI, 409).

The Vincentian community will be authentic if it breaks the Eucharistic bread together, since at the beginning and now the Eucharist is the source of community life and the inspiration of apostolic initiatives; it supports a community that is open to mission, being itself a personal and communitary experience of the Resurrected Jesus.

St. Vincent reasoned that all the ingredients which nourished the life of the first Christian communities nourished also the life of the Vincentian communities. For this reason he pronounced the words, already quoted: "What a blessing for the Mission to be able to imitate the first Christians and live like them!" (SV XI, 226). Our present Constitutions take it for granted that at the beginning of the third millennium the missionaries of the C.M. will organize communities similar to those of the first Christians: "Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we build up a unity among ourselves to achieve our mission, and so offer credible witness to Christ the Savior" (C 20, 3°).

6. Conclusion

St. Vincent desired that the community life of the C.M. rest upon firm foundations. He found these bases in the Word of God, particularly in three theological sources or paradigms: the Holy Trinity, the community of Jesus and his disciples, and the first Christian communities. At the present time, without ignoring the contributions of human sciences that refer to community living, we believe that an attentive and faith-filled reading of the Word of God, guided by teachings and orientations, continues to be the heart and soul of Vincentian community life.

(JOHN KENNEDY, C.M., translator)

The Community Project

by José Antonio Ubillús, C.M.

Assistant General

8.VI.2001

1. Importance

The Constitutions give us a practical way of renewing community life: the Community Project. This can a very efficacious means for renewal if the members accept it as a "covenant." If by dialogue based on common experience we can arrive at greater unity of ideas and an expression of common judgments, we can commit ourselves before God and our confreres to live a covenant of common action whatever we have agreed upon. The Community Project will be the written witness to this covenant.

It is evident that creating and living out a covenant demands much creativity and responsibility of the local community. There are no structures imposed from outside. We must create structures to oblige us from within. And it goes without saying, a covenant implies that having reached common decisions and created local structures, we must fulfill and live them. Every project is a long road to travel. Without unity, effort, commitment, and concrete action, it becomes a dead letter (cf. R. MALONEY, *The Way of Vincent de Paul*, Brooklyn, New York, 1992, p. 137).

2. Goals

- 1st That the local community become a true sign of the Kingdom of God, a school of friendship, fraternity, prayer, correction, and pardon; a producer of truly human, spiritual missionaries in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized.
- 2nd That each community undertake a pilgrimage to the sources of the Congregation of the Mission: the gospel of Jesus Christ; the spiritual experience of St. Vincent centered on Jesus Christ the evangelizer and servant; and the poor, to whom the good news must be proclaimed; that they contribute to the "refounding" or "revitalization," which means returning to the base and to the essential elements of the Congregation, so that it becomes an authentic spiritual missionary movement in the midst of a world characterized by an increasing consciousness of today's diversity of sociocultural and ecclesial elements.

3. Structure

A community project must treat of several elements. To achieve a sufficiently clear vision it seems to me convenient to point out seven essential steps we can group in two sections.

a) *Proposals*

We must be clear on these proposals, since it is only from them that we can gain an adequate understanding of the project: they set the tone by which the community goes forward. After all, the project is an instrument for the community's growth towards its ideals. If these are poorly defined, the project will not work.

1st Step: Anthropological. Achieving a dynamic understanding of the person:

- understood as a process of autonomous growth,
- and as an encounter with others, removing the tension between autonomy and dependence.

2nd Step: Theological. Keeping in mind that the basis for the identity of a Christian community is the primacy of the free and gratuitous love of God and his Kingdom of communion (*koinonia*). Without the immense gratuity of God's love, community life cannot be understood. This gives it its sense and extent. Away from this gratuitous love and its demands, community life can be lost — as has often happened — in purely formal rules of conduct, in distortions of abuse of power, in living by strictly worldly categories.

3rd Step: Psychosocial: Criteria by which we distinguish between healthy and unhealthy community comportment, and the need to learn how to achieve better communication, mutual acceptance, and how to handle conflicts.

b) *Elaboration of the Project*

Without the previous three prerequisites it would be very difficult to inaugurate a Community Project.

This second part contains the four steps necessary for elaboration of the Project.

1st (See): The analysis, community discernment, of the reality, the situation, in which the community lives and works.

2nd (Judge): An experience: understanding acquired through biblical, spiritual, theological reflection, to the end:

- that the community identifies clearly its problems and realizes the need for change, awakening its best internal dynamics so as to begin the process;

- that it bridges the gap between the gospel and the modern and post-modern world, between the spirit of God's Kingdom and the inhumanity of our times;
- that it reaffirm its preferential option for the poor and continue stubbornly proclaiming the Kingdom of God, not as a victory, but as an attraction to a Christian life of prayer and action. The final document of the 1998 General Assembly says: "As the people of God in the service of the Kingdom, following Jesus Christ evangelizer of the poor, we know we have been sent to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to labor in the service of the Kingdom." "Such happiness, my brothers, to help the poor know God, to announce Jesus Christ to them, to tell them that the Kingdom of heaven is near, and that Kingdom belongs to the poor" (SV XII, 80).

3rd (Consequence): Strategically planning priorities, objectives, and means, by which the community will collaborate with others of the social reality which surrounds it for the changes and dynamics of change awakened by enlightenment and resulting in concrete commitments.

4th (Act): The application of the Project to ordinary life, and its evaluation, that is, putting it into practice.

4. Conclusions

1st Community life takes us into a privileged ambiance of encounter. But this encounter can frustrate so that the community be reduced to just a group of solitary people, often hard workers. Perhaps the more work, the more solitary. A vocation to community life is found in the will to build fraternity.

2nd Fraternal life, as a task, is a continual leaving, a call to get out of one's self, an abandoning of narcissism, a growth in sensibility to move toward encountering my brother.

Coming together in union is our promised land. As long as our journey endures, brothers and conflicts are the burning bush from which God calls us to serve him "in spirit and in truth," in order to advance toward liberation from the individualism that enslaves us. When a religious experience turns its back on the cries of one's brothers, Yahve is replaced by the idol of narcissism. Only "relationship with other humans is the authentic allegory of relationship with God," writes M. Buber (*I and You*, Caparros, Madrid 1993, p. 95).

3rd The Community Project should help us to live and construct fraternity understood as gift and task, and to urge us on to the

evangelization and service of the marginalized poor. But what is happening with our community projects? Are they creating better quality of life and reviving our interpersonal relations, our common faith, our communication and our mission? What is failing in their conception, elaboration, and application?

It would be good to pause for a moment and look at our projects, since the quality of our community life depends in part on them.

(JOHN KENNEDY, C.M., translator)

Vincentian Community, Community for the Mission

by Santiago Azcárate, C.M.

Visitor of Zaragoza

9.VI.2001

Introduction

Considering the concrete specification of the theme proposed to us, I will concentrate directly on the part assigned to me. Only in passing will I refer to St. Vincent following our traditions, since I suppose this will be treated adequately by different speakers.

My reflection treats of the theme "Vincentian Community, Community for the Mission." And I have chosen as a theme text no. 19 of the Constitutions, a number which makes three basic affirmations:

- The Vincentian Community is for the evangelization of the poor.
- The Vincentian Community is dedicated to the preparation of apostolic activity, to encourage and help it constantly.
- All must dedicate themselves, in fraternal unity, to the continual renovation of our common mission.

Community and mission appear then, in this number of our constitutions, to be intrinsically united. So, from the very beginning of the norms on community life, it is clearly recognized that Community is for the Mission.

We have really an affirmation that there can be no Christian community which is not at the same time a missionary community. The document "Fraternal Life in Community" (58) says: "As the Holy Spirit anointed the Church in the Cenacle in order to send it to evangelize the world, so every religious community, as an authentic emanation of the resurrected Lord, is by its very nature, apostolic. Community and Mission are co-penetrated and mutually involved, so much so that community represents the source, and at the same time, the fruit of the mission, community is missionary and the mission is community".

The fact is that the community itself has a missionary signification, since the mission which it has received from Christ is to realize unity among ourselves. "By this they will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). And we know very well how in the primitive Church it was the fraternal testimony of the community that advanced the faith, so much so that Acts usually takes for granted a direct relation between the unity of the first Christians and the arrival of new believers (Acts: 2:44-47; 4:32-33; 5:12-14). So we have a reciprocity between community and mission: community is for the mission, and mission creates community.

1. Community and Mission in our Vincentian roots

All this is clearly seen in the very beginnings of our Vincentian community. Our Company was born as an apostolic group. The mission to the poor country people brought about the union of the first priests with Vincent De Paul, so that the contract of 17 April 1625 stresses clearly the primary apostolic character of the community ("It will dedicate itself entirely and exclusively to the salvation of the poor, going from village to village.... They will live in common under obedience to M. de Paul... they will be obliged to go every five years to all the lands of the founders..."). After Folleville, the experience which originated this movement, the mission proved to be too much for only one person, which made it necessary to recruit more priests for the mission. It was this mission that resulted in the forming of a society of priests in apostolic community.

We are not, nevertheless, faced with a community merely instrumental in serving one task, but with a group which, following the example of Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor, in the company of his disciples, comes together for mission and to show, both by apostolic labor and its style of life, that God loves the poor. In this sense we cannot forget that the Mission is directed more to a constituted body than to persons.

The Mission is confided to the Congregation (C. 19), and then, through it, to the confreres. Apostolic life and community life cannot be separated.

We speak, furthermore, of community for the mission because that was the vision of the life of Christ, evangelization of the poor as a sign of the arrival of the Kingdom, that which defines and gives theological life to the Vincentian community, being the common missionary perspective that stimulates personal evangelical ardor, common life, and apostolic service.

2. Elements of a Vincentian community for the Mission

Since we have not been asked for a conference, but just a presentation of a theme, we are not interested in theorizing on the mutual implications between community and mission, but in presenting some of the elements which must be kept in mind today in defining the missionary character of our community. So I offer the following points:

a) *A living and committed consciousness of the present moment*

A missionary community cannot take refuge in nostalgia for the past nor get lost in dreams of the future.

A missionary community must be very conscious of the reality in which it lives, which implies knowing it, studying it, and living it. The society which shelters us is very different today than that in which the majority grew up; it is a society in continual process of change, pluralist, secular, globalized, with serious social problems all of which decisively influence the way we understand and live community life. So it is necessary that we form a consciousness of our situation, and get used to distinguishing, since he who does not distinguish, confuses. And sometimes we confuse too many things: evangelical poverty with economy, unity with uniformity, fidelity with custom, peace with order, obedience with submission, contemplation with evasion, being united with being together, apostolic zeal with activism, praying with prayers, personality with individualism, sincerity with spontaneity, prudence with cowardice, authority with authoritarianism, understanding with permissiveness, responsibility with worry, liberty with independence, autonomy with disinterestedness. It is not the same thing to look at the constitution of a missionary community from one or the other of these opposites. How do we overcome this confusion?

By perceiving the magnitude of present changes, not being affected by them, and facing them seriously:

- Placing ourselves at the root of community missionary life which is Christ-Evangelizer; and from there
- Looking at the present world with reality and hope; and from there locating the Community.

b) *Well-defined faith and charismatic identity*

Surrounded by a society in which conversation about faith is generally accepted, and in which the very environment accepts optional beliefs, we carry out our missionary ministry in an atmosphere of indifference abounding in opposing religious offerings. This results in a personal faith which deepens the

experience of God and discovers in Christ the vital reason for existence. It brings about a kind of community which facilitates that religious experience by means of an encounter with Christ in prayer as well as an encounter with one's brother. Without a radically experienced faith, personally assumed and maturely affirmed, a missionary community life today is impossible.

On the other hand, considering the conformity of communities continually more heterogeneous in relation to ministries (each house dedicated to parish, prison, hospital, education), achieving a well-defined charismatic identity is necessary. If the greater number of projects reach the missionary from outside the community and the necessary stimuli are also found outside, it is necessary that the spirit of identity and belonging be cultivated diligently in order to avoid dispersion and other loyalties. We cannot offer true service to the Church and to the poor if we dilute our spirit with a generic reference to the Gospel, or with characteristics which are not really ours.

c) *Community more charismatic than institutional*

A Vincentian missionary community cannot be trapped in institutional customs which arose in the past, but must be supported by the charism of continually designing its presence and redefining its strategies. It cannot be taken for granted that we can continue doing the same things, changing only their forms. Nor can we attempt at any cost to hang on to long established works even at the risk of destroying many of our companions. The important question must not be: How do we keep inherited structures or known institutional customs? But: How to witness to Jesus today? How to strengthen here and now the following of Christ the Evangelizer of the poor? The important thing for a missionary community is to visualize its specific identity, continually renewing the adequate method of making Christ present to the poor. And this implies trusting more in the spirit than in the organization, worrying about fidelity to a charism more than about regular observance of an established order, stressing more spiritual dynamics than practical means. This should result in a constant discernment in the Lord. To speak of community for the mission is the same as speaking of community in discernment, since without apostolic discernment of the mission there are no evangelical guarantees of learning or realizing the will of God. The entire community is called on to discover what the Lord desires. This presupposes searching for the will of God from his, not my, viewpoint; seeking to have works, not just motives, to listen to the spiritual perception of each and every member; to try to maintain the unity of the group in the process of discernment as well as in carrying it out. This discernment in

common is exactly what simplifies the overcoming of that often perceived tension between community and fidelity to the mission. In community we seek the will of God, and that is found in the mission. And it is the community that is available for mission, and it is mission which forms the community.

d) *Possessed of a participative, co-responsible structure of communication*

Called to "prepare, encourage, and constantly help apostolic activity," the Vincentian community must seek the contributions of all to the common mission. It is absolutely necessary, in this sense, to create an authentic conscience that our mission is unique, that it belongs to the community and needs the cooperation of all. Stagnant activities, individual works margined from the community are not worthwhile if there is no mission confided to the community which is based on personal aptitudes and which is committed to all in an attitude of co-responsibility and participation. This calls many of us to a change of mentality and comportment. It calls us to adopt a real ecclesiology of communion, to be always open to dialogue and communication. This implies a lot of openness, information, intimacy, mutual help, interchange, sharing of responsibilities, authentic participation of all in the decision-making process. A mission cannot belong to all if one person monopolizes responsibility and treats his companions in an infantile manner. You cannot talk of missionary community if there is no mature participation of all in the realization of the mission. It is necessary then to arouse the interest of all in the tasks of the community, to share responsibilities, define means of participation in planning and the realization of common missionary life and facilitating communication and dialogue. All this must be done for the community's creation of a well-defined project: a project which begins by divining the will of God for the group; a project which places the community in an attitude of mission through a shared vocation and an analysis of reality; a project which is carried out and continually evaluated more from a missionary sense which animates, than from the practical materialization of its content. And how it is done is more important than what is done; so the necessity of seeking a lifestyle less installed and more agile, less comfortable and more sober, less routine and more imaginative, less secure and more committed.

e) *Open community*

The importance of every believer in the life of the Church, as a principal reason, and in many cases the weakness of our human resources necessitate the creation of some open communities. Today

the exclusive responsibility for the mission cannot fall to some members, neither by ecclesiology, nor reality.

Today the collaboration of all is necessary to carry the community commitment forward. This implies open communities which know how to enrich themselves through the contributions of others; open communities capable of sharing prayer, coming together, working and living with other Christians who agree with our charism. The possibilities opened by the Superior General in associating groups and persons to the Congregation of the Mission should be taken advantage of in order to give more vigor to our communities and greater consistency to our mission. All this clearly demands a non-sacralized style of life.

At the same time openness means being available for collaboration with the laity in their missionary activity. Today all are responsible for the life and mission of the Church. The document (*Fraternal Life in Community*; 70) Fraternal life is an example of ecclesial communion, and at the same time directs our apostolic energies to evangelize the world. The document adds "Collaboration and interchange as gifts become more intense when groups of laity participate by vocation and, as far as possible, within one spiritual family, in the charism and mission of the institute." In this context, we are lucky to have the Vincentian Family to cooperate in evangelizing the poor. The convictions and commitments of our last General Assembly are well oriented toward this cooperation. A principal objective of each community must be, then, to seek in the groups of the Vincentian Family a commitment to our common mission.

f) *Insertions with the poor*

Since evangelization of the poor was the determining factor at the origin of our Company, so evangelization of the poor must determine all community activity. In the oft quoted document, N° 63 speaks of "communities of insertion," which are expressions of the preferential option for and solidarity with the poor, accompanying them in a process of integral liberation, and which are also the fruits of a desire to discover Christ, a poor Christ in my marginalized brother in order to serve and identify Christ in him. This option for the poor is not preferential for us, but exclusive; so our Vincentian communities must seek the greatest possible insertion with the poor in order to make present to them in a clearer way the love of Christ which redeems and liberates.

This presupposes three concrete challenges: presence, solidarity and creativity. Presence: because our specific place, like Christ's, is with the poor. God calls the Vincentian community where the poor live, which means constantly relocating our communities and

rethinking the thoughts of those who are not poor. Solidarity: putting means and personnel at the service of the poor, opening ourselves to cooperation with other groups. All this following the example of Christ who was penetrated with the desire not for the path of power but of service. Creativity: to make effective the gospel in work (one's own experience) and deeds (changing reality). Creativity does not mean spontaneity, nor breaking with the past, nor making speedy decisions. Creativity presupposes preparation, a capacity to support individuals and communities with adequate, specific formation, vocationally committed, and a decided institutional support.

Since our Vincentian community began for the reevangelization of the poor, it is precisely this insertion among the poor that determines the erection of a community as well as its internal dynamism.

g) *Gifted with the authority to animate and serve*

The figure of the superior is important in the Vincentian community, a figure which used to determine to a great extent community life. If today we want to accentuate the missionary character of the Vincentian community, we cannot follow the line of order, timetable, and discipline, but rather the way of openness, collaboration with the laity, insertion with the poor, and corresponsibility. We must understand the function of the superior in animation and service. The truth is that all evangelical authority emanated from Mark 10: "The Son of Man did not come to be serve, but to serve." So that in a community understood as a union of brothers in the same vocation, for the same mission, authority cannot be superior, nor director, nor coordinator, nor ruler, but the animator of one spirit and one mission.

This implies a participative frame of mind which encourages relationships among brothers, shares leadership, stimulates corresponsibility. It leads to options for creativity, openness to mission, designing of procedures, planning and projects. It requires attitudes of love of Christ and the poor, of humility and service, of generosity and witness.

And all this thought over, analyzed, and projected toward mission. Authority is at the service of the community. Community is at the service of the mission. Authority, therefore, must focus all on the service of community animation in view of the mission. Although circumstances, cultures, times, personnel change, the mission continues as always: evangelization of the poor. So he who has authority must encourage newness and change, creativity and presence among the poor.

3. Actuality and vigor of the Vincentian Community for the Mission

We must accept seriously this capacity of the Vincentian community for the good of the poor whom we wish to evangelize and also for attracting the potential in today's youth. These often fear a definitive commitment, perceive the Church as irrelevant, criticize its moral as obsolete and as not aware of their commitment to the grave problems with poverty, ecology, drugs. But it is also true that many of them seek suggested projects, very demanding, which reinforce the internal cohesion of a group committed to the great causes of humanity, capable of making sense out of life.

It seems true that predisposition to prolonged options has diminished. But has predisposition to projects of interior transformation diminished? Probably not. What has happened is that many competitions to the classic vocation (priestly and religious) have arisen: "Lay missionaries," social workers, psychologists, physicians, part-time teachers. And in this "open market" of salvation the "law of supply and demand" rules: much supply, little demand. And, above all, the "law of product quality" rules: the offer of best quality wins over the consumer.

Is it not here then, that our project fits? Jesus as model and evangelization of the poor as "profession"? Our Vincentian spirit is a spirit of service of the poor: a spirit, therefore, of solidarity, fraternity, and equality of life, a present-day spirit. Let us take refuge then in what constitutes our identity. Is there any project more daring than the gospel? More radical than that of Christ? Is there a spirit more of the present-day than that of St. Vincent? So we see that our project is daring, radical, and present-day because our identity is evangelical, Christian and Vincentian. Let us live vigorously what we are by vocation and we will possess an offer of quality and a serious project for those who do not want to live in vain.

(JOHN KENNEDY, C.M., translator)

The Vincentian Local Superior

by Józef Kapuściak, C.M.

Assistant General

9.VI.2001

The Preparatory Commission for this meeting has asked me to speak to you about the "Vincentian Local Superior." I will try to fulfil the conditions laid down by the Commission, that is to say "do not give a conference but make a presentation on the theme using as a frame of reference some articles in the *Constitutions and Statutes* and in the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*; be concrete, bring out the principal elements of the theme and do not go beyond the allotted time of 20 minutes."

I. The Local Superior. An important figure in the history of the Congregation

Since the beginnings of our Congregation, the office of Local Superior has always had great importance. It is enough to recall briefly some facts which clearly bear this out.

The office of Local Superior was frequently mentioned by St. Vincent as much in his spoken as in his written words. In the *General Index* of the 14th volume of the *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* of St. Vincent in Pierre Coste's edition, the list of references dealing with this office occupies three entire pages (and these are only the direct references); there are in all 200 references. Fr. Felix Contassot,¹ on the basis of these texts, has written a book entitled *St. Vincent de Paul: Guide for Superiors*, which is about 200 pages long.

In the Codex Sarzana² of 1653, a manuscript containing the first version of the *Common Rules* of our Congregation, we find a large sixth section, divided into eight chapters, setting out the particular rules referring to the Local Superior.

¹ FELIX CONTASSOT, *Saint Vincent de Paul, Guide des Supérieurs*, Paris 1964.

² Cf. "Codex Sarzana," in *Vincentiana* 4-5 (1991), 379-393.

In the definitive version of the *Common Rules of 1658*, we do not find such a section dealing only with the Local Superior, but the superior-subject relationship is dealt with in 63 of the 142 articles, as Fr Robert Maloney, the Superior General, has underlined in his recent study on community life.³

As always in the Congregation, the necessity of having particular rules for the different offices became apparent and that is why a very important document was quickly born: the *Constitutiones et Regulae Visitatoris Inferiorumque Officialium Congregationis Missionis*.⁴ In one of the first versions of this document, printed probably before the General Assembly of 1668, we find one complete part entitled, *Regulae Superioris localis*, made up of six chapters unfolding over 42 pages! These *Regulae officiorum*, revised and modified by successive General Assemblies or by Superiors General,⁵ remained in force, in practice until the period before Vatican II; in fact, their last revision was done by the Superior General, William Slattery, in 1961.

In the *Constitutions* of 1954, updated in particular for the part concerning the administration of the Congregation in conformity with the 1917 Canon Law, the affairs of governance occupy almost half of the document and precede the vows and ministries. Chapter 16, made up of nine articles, is given over entirely to the description of the office of Local Superior.

It is necessary to add that some Superiors General have also been very sensitive to this topic and their circulars have often touched on various aspects linked with the exercise of the role of Local Superior. Fr Fiat, in his *Manual for Superiors of the Congregation of the Mission*,⁶ published in 1901, included a good number of these circulars.

Reading these documents, even quickly, evokes the image of the Local Superior as "an almighty father." According to the established rules, he intervened directly in all aspects of the daily life of the community, of work and of problems which touched on the personal life of each confrere, including the problems of conscience. And everyone had to believe that "the will of God is expressed by the will of the Superior."

³ Cf. ROBERT MALONEY, "As Friends Who Love One Another Deeply," in *Vincentiana* 4-5 (2000), 341.

⁴ ARCHIVES OF THE MAISON-MÈRE, *Constitutiones et Regulae Visitatoris Inferiorumque Officialium Cong. is Miss. is*, ms registre 650, p. 173-236.

⁵ *Regulae Officiorum Congregationis Missionis*, t. 1-2, Paris 1850, 1891.

⁶ *Manuel des Supérieurs*, Paris 1901, p. 108-162.

II. The Vincentian Local Superior in the New Constitutions

After Vatican II, we know, many things changed, in the Church and also in our Congregation. Among others, the manner of understanding authority changed; we moved from a model which was sometimes monarchical to a more participative model which favored dialogue, exchange of views, consultation, communication, information, co-responsibility and communion. This change is also operative in our new *Constitutions*, approved by the Holy See on 29 June 1984, and which came into force on 25 January 1985.⁷

1. General Principles

This is outlined principally in the chapter on Community Life (art. 24, 2°- 27) and especially in the first section of the third part of the *Constitutions*, where the general principles of government of the Congregation are set out (art. 96-100). Allow me to cite two fundamental ones:

The first principle: *"All members, since they have been called to labour for the continuation of the mission of Christ, have the right and responsibility, according to the norms of our own law, of working together for the good of the apostolic community and of participating in its government. Consequently, members should cooperate actively and responsibly in accepting assignments, undertaking apostolic projects and carrying out commands"* (art. 96).

The second principle: *"Those in the Congregation, who exercise authority, which comes from God, and those who have part in this exercise of authority in any way, even in assemblies and councils, should have before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be ministered to but to minister. Hence, conscious of their responsibility before God, they shall consider themselves servants of the community for furthering its own purpose according to the spirit of St. Vincent in a true communion of apostolate and life. They should, therefore, engage in dialogue with members, while retaining the authority to decide and command what is to be done"* (art. 97 § 1 and 2).

These principles, in particular the second, are very clear and also concern the local superior. His office is described especially in articles 129 to 134 of the *Constitutions* and in articles 78 and 79 of the Statutes.

⁷ Cf. YVES DANJOU, "The Government of the Congregation according to the New Constitutions," in *Vincentiana* 4-5 (2000), p. 382-390.

2. Juridical Aspects

Almost all of these articles have, by their nature, a juridical character (C. 130-133; S. 78-79). But we also find some basic elements which allow us to outline the human and spiritual profile of the Local Superior. Among others, we can describe his important role in the community. Let us remain with these points for a moment before passing on to others.

a) Necessary juridical prerequisites. Our particular law fixes the conditions that the Local Superior must fulfil and these are described in articles 61 and 100 of the *Constitutions*. They are: 1) that he be "incorporated into the Congregation for at least three years and twenty-five years of age," and 2) that he be "in Sacred Orders." This latter condition, however, is not absolute since an incorporated brother can become a Local Superior, if the situation requires it and if the Superior General obtains permission for it from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. We have already had one such case in one of the provinces of the United States.

b) Means of Designation. The *Constitutions* envisage two possible procedures for the nomination of a Local Superior.

1° He may be named by the Visitor, or by the Superior General for communities which are under his jurisdiction, with the consent of their respective Councils (C. 125, 4°; 107, 8°), and after consultation with the confreres of the house or local community (C. 130 § 1).

2° It is also possible for a Provincial Assembly to determine another method for the designation of a Local Superior (C. 130 § 2). It seems that, until now, no province has used this second option.

c) Term of Mandate. The Local Superior is named for a three-year period. Under the same conditions, he may be named in the same house or local community for a second triennium. After the second triennium, if it is necessary, the Visitor must have recourse to the Superior General (C. 130 § 1). While the *Constitutions* do not state so explicitly, it is very important and suggested by canon lawyers, that the Visitor — in order to avoid eventual confusion — state in writing how the term of mandate is determined: the date of nomination or confirmation, the date of installation or the moment of taking over the office.⁸

⁸ Cf. MIGUEL PÉREZ-FLORES, *El Superior local de la Congregación de la Misión*, Draft, p. 59.

d) Powers of the Superior. In conformity with our particular law, "the local superior has ordinary power in the internal and external forum for members and others living in his house day and night; he can delegate this power to others" (C. 131).

e) Rights and Duties. The document of the Holy See on relations between bishops and religious in the church, *Mutuae Relationes*, of 14 May 1978, suggests that it would be useful to adapt the obligations of the authority of Religious and Societies of Apostolic Life according to the triple function of priestly ministry: to sanctify, to form and to govern. The *Constitutions* do not follow this guideline but specify concretely what the Local Superior must do. A complete list of his duties is formulated in article 78 of the *Statutes*.

f) Removal from Office. The *Constitutions* foresee that the Superior may be removed from office (C. 133) but do not specify in what cases. They limit themselves to stating what could happen if the Visitor, with the consent of his council and the approval of the Superior General, "judges that there is sufficient and just reason." According to our canonists, these just and sufficient causes may be of a personal, community or ecclesial nature.⁹ Therefore, they deal with cases very different from those described in common law and Canon 194 of the Code of Canon Law (that is, abandoning the clerical state, public renunciation of the Catholic faith, a cleric who has attempted civil marriage).

3. The Nature of the Office and the Spiritual and Human requirements for it

The *Practical Guide for the Visitor* (268-269) underlines the importance of the choice and nomination of Local Superiors, but no mention is made of what must be his human and spiritual attributes. In number 270, mention is only made that they must be "appropriate" to the plan of the Visitor.

The new *Constitutions*, unlike those preceding them, make no mention of the human and spiritual qualities needed to be a Superior. However, the manner in which the office is described, even if only briefly, allows one to deduce what should be the qualities of one so nominated.

The Local Superior is defined as "the centre of unity and animator of the life of the local community." Moreover, it is stated that he "should promote the ministries of the house and be... concerned with the personal development and activities of each confrere" (C. 129 § 2).

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

1. ***Being the centre of unity*** requires a constant dialogue with each confrere and the whole community (cf. C. 24, 2^o). At the same time, as the *Constitutions* stipulate, the Local Superior retains the "authority to decide and command what is to be done" (C. 97, § 2). These last two terms, "decide" and "command" are very strong. Deciding, and then ordering, might easily block communication. It could also happen that those who are not in agreement with the decision taken and the order given might feel themselves discriminated against and little by little distance themselves. The Superior must be conscious of this and must know how, with discernment, to maintain the balance between dialogue and the authority to decide and order what must be done.

2. ***Being the animator of the community*** is the principal task of the Superior. St. Vincent recognises this when he says: "As the soul and heart are to the body, so is the Superior to the Community" (XIII, 144). But this task must be understood and interpreted in a different manner with different people. I believe that we here have very different understandings of this subject.

If we wish to find inspiration in St. Vincent, he will tell us that: "The Superiors are like pilots who must guide a ship on the seas" (X, 262).

Fr. Richard McCullen,¹⁰ successor to St. Vincent, in a conference to local Superiors held in this house some years ago, said, among other things:

At the risk of proposing too broad a view of the duty of animation, I think... that good animation does not solely consist of good administration but a gentle leadership of the community towards a better understanding and greater fidelity to the ideals of St. Vincent, such as they are formulated and authentically interpreted in our Constitutions and Statutes, which have been given to us in our time and for our time.

... Good animation of a community will imply also knowledge of the talents and gifts of the confreres within the local community, a knowledge that is accompanied by encouragement on the part of the Superior to use them, particularly those gifts and talents which the Superior may not possess himself or does not, in fact, possess" (cf. C. 129, § 1 and 2).

We share, entirely or partially, this interpretation of the role of animator. We cannot deny that to be the animator of the community,

¹⁰ Cf. RICHARD MCCULLEN, "Mission au cour de la Mission. Le Supérieur local," in *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, April 1988, 108.

apostolic and spiritual life, as well as being the centre of unity, implies that the Superior must have certain human and spiritual qualities.

3. Human and Spiritual Qualities. Fr. Pérez Flores, in the draft of a *Practical Guide for Local Superiors* which is in the process of preparation, presents a detailed description of these.¹¹ Due to lack of time, I will merely list the principal ones.

The Local Superior must be; **humanly mature, sociable, responsible, simple, humble, patient, prudent, peaceful, respectful towards others, sensitive to the needs of elderly and sick confreres, well-organised, a man of faith and prayer, faithful to the Vincentian spirit and charism and possessing a *sensus Ecclesiae*.**

While this is equally set out in the *Practical Guide for the Visitor* (n° 268), often the Visitors, due to lack of personnel, do not have a great deal of choice or cannot find "ideal" candidates for the task of Local Superiors, but perhaps it is necessary that they keep conscious of the advice of St. Vincent in this regard.

According to our Founder, not suitable are: *those who seek this position* (IV 545), nor *young people* (V 351), nor *the holy, the wise or the old as such* (IX 517, 668; XII 48-50) *but rather those who add to knowledge the spirit of understanding and good judgement* (XII 50) and *have a love for the rule and for their vocation* (XIII 356).

With these few words from St. Vincent, I must end for my time is already up. Many thanks for you attention and your patience.

EUGENE CURRAN, C.M., translator)

¹¹ Cf. MIGUEL PEREZ FLOREZ, *op. cit.*, p. 4-16.

The Vincentian Family in the World

by Benjamín Romo, C.M.

Delegate for the Vincentian Family

11.VI.2001

Branches of the same trunk

The followers of St. Vincent enter the new millennium conscious of being part of the Vincentian Family, especially for three motives:

- a common origin;
- a mission all of us share: to serve the poor both spiritually and materially;
- a common lifestyle, marked by simplicity, humility and a practical and effective charity.

Delegate for the Vincentian Family

In November 1998, the Superior General, following a petition from the General Assembly, asked me to collaborate in the animation of the Vincentian Family. I began this job in January 1999, a service which consists especially in maintaining communication with the different branches of the Vincentian Family and in making visits of animation and formation in the countries where they exist.

All began with St. Vincent

We all know about the giant work St. Vincent organized during his life, having recruited men and women, young and old, rich and poor. It was really an army of people ready to serve Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ.

St. Vincent made direct contact with the poor and sent anybody God sent him to the poor. Once he wrote to St. Louise:

Go, Mademoiselle, in the name of Our Lord. I pray that his divine mercy may accompany you, that it be your consolation on the road, your shade in the heat, your shelter in the rain and cold, a soft bed in your weariness, strength in your labors, and finally, that it bring you back in perfect health and full of good works.¹

¹ SV I, 73-74.

As he sent her, St. Vincent, from 1617 until his death, sent many priests, laity, men and women to serve the poor, since Christ is in them and to serve them is to love God in an effective way.

The charism of St. Vincent has lasted all these years. The Holy Spirit keeps on raising servants of the poor after the Vincentian style: thousands of laity and consecrated religious desire to live their faith, surrendering to God by serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor, convinced that "we cannot assure ourselves of eternal happiness in any better way than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of Providence and in renunciation of ourselves to follow Jesus."²

Our Constitutions

The Constitutions of 1980, speaking of the end of the Congregation, noted clearly a mission which has now become an urgent task:

*The members... help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor.*³

By the Constitutions we are called to form clergy and laity toward a very concrete and clear end: participation in a greater way in the evangelization of the poor. This is fulfilling what St. Vincent used to say: "It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him."⁴

The 1998 General Assembly

The paths of God are full of surprises for those who recognize that they are poor and hope for all from God. The Holy Spirit, at the end of the last millennium, wanted to prepare us for entry in the new millennium with a renewed spirit and with new paths to the mission. The Pope reminds us:

*Launch out into the deep! This call echos also today for us and invites us to recall with gratitude the past, to live the present passionately, and to open ourselves confidently to the future: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and always (Heb 13:8).*⁵

² SV III, 392.

³ C 1, 3^o.

⁴ SV XII, 262.

⁵ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, No. 1 (6 January 2001).

In this same sense, the theme of our 1998 General Assembly was: The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges for the Mission in the Third Millennium. During the Assembly we were given new experiences and new ideas. We can mention the presence and participation of lay Vincentians who invited us to live in the spirit of the Vincentian Family, a spirit of collaboration, of common formation, of participation, and of a shared charism.

At the closing of the Assembly, the Superior General sent the entire Congregation on a new and clear mission: *Go, tell the confreres confidently that with the members of our family we can be an enormous force in the service of the poor.*⁶

The 1998 General Assembly sent all the members of the Congregation to collaborate with other members of the Vincentian Family, responding together to the cry of the poor. Our mission does not end with just the personal or community surrendering to the poor. It goes farther and calls us to seek concrete ways of involving others, men and women, young and old, so that they, by discovering the richness of our charism, will serve the poor.

After three years, we now pause to analyze three realities:

- steps taking in different countries,
- possibilities and opportunities we now have to spread the Vincentian charism,
- dreams of opening together paths which the Lord wants the entire Vincentian Family to take.

So we ask:

What are the ways indicated by the 1998 General Assembly, in relation to the Vincentian Family, for the province, local communities, and confreres of my country, over the last three years?

* * *

I would like to reflect with you on the three aforementioned realities:

1. What has been done? A few facts:

a) On the level of collaboration

The desire for collaboration among branches of the Vincentian Family is a reality. Many signs indicate this. I cite only a few:

⁶ *Vincentiana*, No. 4-5/1998 (July-October), 401.

- Moments for growing in mutual acquaintance have been held.
- Times for reflection and study of different types of poverty have been set aside, in order to seek practical and effective solutions together.
- Times for prayer, reflection, and gathering, which those responsible nationally, taking advantage of the feast of St. Vincent, have organized. Each time these have been improved. They have helped in knowledge, unity, formation, and in mutual support in service to the poor.
- National Coordination of the Vincentian Family has been set up in more than 20 countries, which has resulted in greater mutual acquaintance and has created conditions for common formation and collaboration.
- A Coordination Commission of the Vincentian Family has been created in Latin America. Its function is: *to serve as a liaison between general and national Directors, stimulating unity and integration among the branches of the Vincentian Family for a better service to the poor, respecting the identity and autonomy of each.*⁷
- "Vincentian Youth: Rome 2000" was held, with youth from over 50 countries attending to spend a week in Vincentian formation, prayer, and togetherness.
- Common prayer, prayed as a family.

b) *Our formation in relation to the laity of the Vincentian Family*

Vincentian laity request us to offer them formation. This is their clearest and most urgent petition.

Many positive steps have been taken in this sense. I mention a few:

- Editing of the book: *Spirituality for Lay Vincentians*, which is underway and to which different branches of the Vincentian Family have contributed.
- Organization of weeks of Vincentian formation, whose themes have been centered on Vincentian spirituality and action. Also, courses on Church social doctrine.
- Joint efforts for Vincentian formation, e.g.: a week of study in Salamanca, formation meeting by CLAPVI, groups for Vincentian animation in different countries.

⁷ Consejo Latinoamericano de la Familia Vicentina, Reglamento Interno, art. 3.

- More formation material. Sharing it with other groups.
- Vincentian Family Web Site, now an instrument for members of the Vincentian Family. John Freund's work on this is to be admired.
- A "Document for Moderators of the AIC" has been drawn up and is proving very useful in clarifying the role of the priest and the Daughter of Charity in relation to the laity.
- A similar document is in the works for moderators of JMV.
- In July 2002 a "Vincentian Month for Moderators of Lay Groups of the Vincentian Family" will be held.
- In response to concerns about formation, a workshop for moderators of different Vincentian Family groups in Africa was held in the Republic of the Congo.

c) *Concrete activities in favor of the poor*

- Participation in common projects has been increasing in many countries in a spontaneous manner, as a response to knowledge and common formation. Projects cannot be started without a family atmosphere where knowledge, prayer, reflection, and formation in common exist as a basis for joint action on projects of service to the poor.
- Project on "The Globalization of Charity: The Fight Against Hunger," coming out of the Paris meeting of leaders of the Vincentian Family this year.
- Help in emergencies (Mozambique and Central America).

Question:

What steps have been taken in your countries towards collaboration, formation, and projects in common with the Vincentian Family?

2. Reality and projects of some groups

2.1 AIC

Reality:

- First group founded by St. Vincent (1617).
- Present today in 50 countries with 260,000 members.
- For the past few years has worked hard at the self-promotion of its members, enabling them to reach the most abandoned, and in their organized labors.
- www.famvin.org/aic

Motto:

Change is not an option, but an exigence.

Lines of action:

To become a critical and prophetic presence in society, an unceasing source of good news and a transforming force:

- in the Association
- for the poor
- in society.

Only by means of a firmer spirit of belonging to the Association, of experiencing direct contact with the poor, and of the participation of the entire society, will we be able to contribute to an international effort to eliminate poverty.⁸

2.2 SSVdP**Projects and hopes:**

- To advance in organization and professionalism of the international headquarters: the SSVdP is setting up a new administration which it hopes to have functioning in Rome within two years.
- To create basic elements of formation.
- To intensify internal communication.
- A project for information and formation of the SSVdP in Mandarin.
- Create a network of communication and formation on the web site: www.ozanet.org

2.3 JMV**Reality:**

Present in 49 countries. Great growth and organization over the last three years. The Daughters of Charity and the confreres have contributed significantly to the growth of the Association.

Achievements:

- International Assembly 2000. Two results: election of the first International Council and editing a Final Document.

⁸ This sentence is taken textually from "Documento para facilitar la aplicación de las líneas programáticas," March 1999.

- Creation of an International Secretariat in Madrid.
- Creation of a web site: www.secretariadojmv.org

Projects:

- Consolidate an international structure.
- Seek ways of putting into practice the Final Document in all countries.
- Elaboration of programs and material of formation.

2.4 AMM**Reality:**

- Seven countries with organized and recognized AMM.
- Five are drawing up their own Statutes.
- It exists in many countries where the CM and DCs are present.

Projects and hopes:

- Meeting in Rome (October 2001) of moderators and lay leaders.
- Strong efforts to establish in many other countries.
- Great possibility of the Association becoming larger with a significant evangelizing possibility.
- www.amm.org

2.5 MISEVI**Reality:**

- Officially recognized by the Church in 1999.
- In January 2001 held its first General Assembly: 16 countries represented. Its results: creation of an International Council and a Final Document.

Projects:

- Put the Final Document in practice.
- Maintain contact with countries interested in starting the Association.
- Continue to offer the entire Vincentian Family concrete ways to practice the missionary dimension of the Vincentian charism.
- Like the AMM, we hope to see this Association grow within the Vincentian Family, since the laity have the ability to

strongly impel the missionary dimension of the Vincentian charism. Young Vincentians need this Association.

- www.misevi.org

The Superior General addressed the Visitatrixes of the Daughters of Charity in Rome:

*I encourage you to look at the newest member of our Vincentian Family, MISEVI, Vincentian Lay Missionaries. It has a well worked out statute for sending people to mission countries to offer their service to the poor for from three to five years. Can MISEVI come to exist in everyone of your countries?*⁹

Question:

What Vincentian lay groups exist in my country? What can I do to establish MISEVI and AMM?

3. Challenges

Looking to the future with the desire to encourage our working with the laity, we surely are faced with many tasks to accomplish. Let us look at four realities, out of many more, which exist and are worth considering.

a) *Studying the Vincentian charism here and now in our history*

Our charism is a dynamic and living reality, an interior stimulus, a light to illumine a reality formerly hidden. The problem with the charism is that we see it as backward or nostalgic, or as an unreal, futuristic dreamlike entity. The correct way is to live it right now and in those places the Lord indicates, in the manner adequate for those who need it. As the Spanish poet, León Felipe, wrote:

No one went yesterday, nor goes today, nor will go tomorrow toward God by the same paths I go. For each one there is a new ray of sunlight, a virgin path to God.

The last General Assembly asked us to review our apostolic projects and community structures, seeking sincerely roads to conversion and fidelity to our Founder.¹⁰ We need a new language, that of the poor, which will identify us with the poor.

⁹ Robert P. Maloney, C.M., Conference to the Visitatrixes of the Daughters of Charity, May 19, 2000.

¹⁰ Cf. *Vincentiana*, No. 4/5, July-October 1998. XXXIX General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, Convictions, No. 2.

b) *Encourage formation*

The last Assembly also told us:

We recognize, as members of the Congregation of the Mission, the need for a change of heart if we are to collaborate generously with other members of the Vincentian Family and so recognize the gifts and talents of others in promoting the reign of God.¹¹

This means, among other things, being alert to learn from the laity, to listen, to accompany, to collaborate with them, in a mentality of Church, the "people of God." Collaboration with the laity with faith in their possibilities and potentialities demands of us Vincentian missionaries attitudes of humility and attentive listening to them. It also means breaking with any clericalist attitude which favors paternalism and dependance. It signifies development of formation programs on missionary spirituality for laity, Vincentian spirituality which will affect family, social, labor, cultural, and political life. The laity ask us to reveal to them St. Vincent and his spirituality, and open to them the privilege of serving the poor.

c) *Reaching the world of youth*

Today's youth are a great social force and evangelizing potential. They form a very numerous sector of society, especially in poorer countries. Many young people go through life searching for meaning, with a real thirst for God as well as for hope. Every branch of the Vincentian Family, including ourselves, has space for youth. To approach and listen to them, inviting them into our family, is possible and urgent.

We are challenged to create new groups within the branches of the Vincentian Family, especially among youth, inspiring them with our charism, that they also become servants and evangelizers in their own environments (school, university, world of labor, missions *ad gentes*). We must seek concrete ways to create local communities more open to the laity, and especially to youth, where we can share prayer and the apostolate of service with them.

d) *Forming, in ourselves, a mentality of collaboration*

The Holy Spirit is moving us along the path of unity and of collaboration as a Family, respecting the autonomy of persons and groups. Our challenge is to work together against poverty, inequality,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Commitments, No. 1.

and the injustice which affect a great part of humanity: the poor; to act together in the struggle against the causes of poverty brought about by the exaggerated wealth of a few. The Vincentian Family united throughout the world will be able to inspire a worldwide struggle against hunger, poverty, injustice, corruption, and the loss of ethical values. Globalization, secularization, and other signs of the times, demand answers that are evangelical, concrete, and effective, to enable us to change all that is contrary to God's plan. The force of the Vincentian charism is revealing itself in the laity as a movement of the Holy Spirit which we are called on to encourage. We recall again the words of the Holy Father:

*It means continuing a tradition of charity which has perdured for two millennia, but which today requires greater creativity. It is time for a new portrait of charity which promotes not only the efficacy of the helps offered, but which also brings us closer and more in solidarity with the sufferer, so that our gesture of aid be not felt as a humiliating alms, but as a fraternal sharing.*¹²

The words of the Superior General, pronounced three years ago, are still urgent:

*Go, tell the confreres confidently that with the members of our family we can be an enormous force in the service of the poor.*¹³

(JOHN KENNEDY, C.M., translator)

¹² *Op. cit.*, No. 50.

¹³ *Vincentiana*, No. 4-5/1998 (July-October), 401.

Report on the International Formation Center Saint Vincent de Paul (CIF)

by John Rybolt, C.M.

Director of CIF

11.VI.2001

A few months ago, the two directors of the CIF programs, Juan Julián Díaz Catalán and I, received a letter from a confrere who had recently been in the Ongoing Formation Program. Listening to it is a good way to begin this presentation:

I want to thank you both for a wonderful experience at CIF. I really enjoyed my time in Paris and in the program. I found it to be relaxing, very informative, prayerful, and it gave me a real sense of enthusiasm for my new ministry... When I arrived back [in my province] it was a joy to share my experience with my confreres... about the CIF program. Sharing my experience with some of the other confreres who had been in Paris was a real privilege, as well as sharing with those who have not yet had the privilege to participate in CIF. ... [T]he time at CIF was the best experience I had in my community life. It gave me the opportunity reflect on my ministry and vocation, it gave me the opportunity to share with and listen to the life experience and ministry of other Vincentians, and, more importantly, it gave me the opportunity to become closer to and to learn more about the charism and history of Vincent and the Congregation. ... I came back renewed and with an open mind about what it means to serve the poor in many different ways as a Vincentian.

Since this is not the only letter we have received like this, we both have a great sense of confidence that a good formula has been found to help in the continuing formation of the Congregation.

1. Statistics

You might be interested in some statistics that summarize the number of participants, the number of sessions, the number of speakers, and the number of provinces who have sent participants.

Program	Sessions	Participants	Provinces
Ongoing Formation, 1994-	13	293	47
Vincentian Heritage, 2000-	3	56	24
(Vincentian Specialists)	—	—	—

[Ongoing Formation participants include four members of the Vincentian Congregation (India). Vincentian Heritage participants include one member of Brothers of Our Mother of Mercy (Netherlands)].

2. History

Where did these programs come from?

I believe that the idea of continuing formation for the Congregation began in the time of St. Vincent himself. At the first Assembly held in his lifetime, in October 1642, we read the following paragraph:

Next, the Assembly decided two things: 1) that henceforth there would be a second probation, which would take place at Saint-Lazare or wherever else the Superior General would indicate; that it would take place only six or seven years after the seminary, for an interval of one year, without, nevertheless, limiting the power of the Superior General, who can always either delay the six or seven years, or shorten the said year of probation, as he deems advisable for the good of the individual and the need of the Company (XIII, 295).

Although this was his clear wish and the wish of the Assembly, the time was not ripe for such a program. The Assembly of 1668 spoke to the question, but the members had to admit that the time was still not ripe. The Assembly of 1711, however, agreed that the time had come. Consequently, Fr. Jean Bonnet, Superior General 1711-1735, decided with his council to begin the program on 15 August 1712, at Saint Charles, the former minor seminary on the Saint Lazare property. Ten confreres participated during nine weeks and, at the end, Bonnet reported they were "very happy and edified," as were the confreres at Saint Lazare. This "seminary of renewal," as it was called, lasted for a few years, but difficult financial problems in

France caused its suspension. It seems not to have had much success, but was often called for, even up to 1786.

It would take many generations and crises before the General Assembly of 1992 decreed that such a program should begin again. The result was that Fr. Maloney inaugurated the program in the fall of 1994. Modifications were made at the Assembly of 1998 to open the already-successful programs to confreres above the age of 50.

3. Programs

The result is that the CIF (the International Formation Center: Saint Vincent de Paul) has two functioning programs and one planned program. The oldest program is the Ongoing Formation Program, designed for confreres between the ages of 35 and 50, with at least five years of pastoral experience since their priestly ordination or the vows as brothers. The next program, Vincentian Heritage, receives confreres above age 50. The oldest participant in the three sessions already held, was 83. The third program, Vincentian Specialists, is for those confreres who wish to concentrate on some particular aspect of Vincentian studies, especially in view of further work in formation. We may have our first confrere in this program in September.

The goals of the programs are defined in the statutes of the Center. First, the Ongoing Formation Program:

a) *Mission*

The International Formation Center: Saint Vincent de Paul (CIF) offers a program of ongoing Vincentian formation for members of the Congregation of the Mission, destined to help them carry out the objective of following Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor. The Center also proposes to promote mutual knowledge among members of the Congregation of the Mission and with other members of the Vincentian Family, the unity of the Congregation of the Mission, an international perspective, and interprovincial collaboration.

The Vincentian Ongoing Formation Program is geared primarily toward members of the Congregation of the Mission, but members of other groups sharing in the Vincentian charism will, from time to time, be accepted as participants.

b) *Program Design*

The Vincentian Ongoing Formation Program includes the following components: academic disciplines, personal study, research, teaching, the development of the vocation and

ministry of the participants, liturgical celebrations, time for prayer and a retreat, the experience of community life, and visits to Vincentian sites. The program lasts for a period of fourteen (14) weeks.

Second, the Vincentian Heritage Program. It has the same mission as the Ongoing Formation Program, but its program design is somewhat different:

The Vincentian Heritage Program includes the following components: conferences on Vincent de Paul and the Congregation of the Mission, personal reading and study, the development of the vocation and ministry of the participants, liturgical celebrations, time for prayer, the experience of community life, and visits to Vincentian sites. The program lasts for a period of four (4) weeks. The program is offered in one language at a time.

Inherent in both these programs is the conviction that the confreres have been giving themselves already, sometimes for many years, to the work of the Mission in the Church. They often arrive tired and anxious, especially since many are leaving their home country and their work for the first time. They need time for rest and recuperation, leading to time for reflection, prayer and meditation. The centerpiece of all of the talks, the discussions, the visits to Vincentian sites, and so forth, is personal renewal in the Congregation of the Mission. Most of the participants agree that this goal is met and that they do return home refreshed and reinvigorated.

4. Finances

The question of finances always attracts the attention of the confreres, particularly of the Visitors and their provincial treasurers. The Statutes of CIF say:

Individual provinces assume responsibility for the expenses of the participants. These expenses are primarily room, board, and program expenses. Program expenses include the support of the directors and the purchase and replacement of necessary equipment. The program is financially self-supporting in that it does not regularly receive subsidies from the Congregation of the Mission to carry on its works.

To continue to be financially self-supporting the CIF has to manage its finances carefully. At the beginning, the program charged 30,000 FF for each participant. A year's experience showed us that this was too high, and the price was lowered to 29,000 FF. It has not changed since then. However, even with various cost-saving

measures, the program has not been able to keep pace with rising costs, such as in the Motherhouse, food, transportation, translation services and supplies. Besides, the European Community will switch to the use of Euro currency within a few months. For this reason, the Superior General and his council have decided to price the Ongoing Formation Program at Euro 5000,00, and the Vincentian Heritage Program at Euro 1500,00. These new prices will be reflected as of 1 September 2001.

For several provinces the costs are high, particularly when you include costs of travel, pocket money and, sometimes, special medical insurance. To help the provinces meet these costs, Fr. Elmer Bauer, the Treasurer General, has prepared a six-page list of helping agencies. The CIF staff does not raise funds for the provinces, in keeping with the Statutes cited above: "Individual provinces assume responsibility for the expenses of the participants." Neither does the CIF give scholarships. However, the General Curia sets aside each year a small sum of money, about US\$ 10,000, for the CIF program to offer to individual provinces who have had no success in raising funds for the program. These funds are designed, therefore, to help in emergencies only, and they should not be counted on as a regular stipend.

Although the CIF staff does not raise funds, we do know that several provinces have been generous in helping other provinces. In the name of those provinces that have already been helped, we add our thanks.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, I have a couple of other issues. First, the CIF staff urges the Visitors to send only those confreres who are able to profit from the programs, especially the Ongoing Formation Program. The CIF is not a therapeutic program, a place of last resort for confreres who have failed at everything else they have tried. The CIF program is not designed for those confreres trying to decide whether to continue in the Congregation. The CIF program is not a vacation, nor is it Vincentian tourism. I repeat that the central purpose is ongoing personal renewal within the Congregation. Obviously, no confrere is perfect, and consequently anyone could profit at least somewhat from a renewal program. However, a confrere with grave problems should not be dumped on the others participating in the program. On the contrary, in our experience, one of the best results of the programs has been the peer ministry among the participants. These men, generally in their late 30s or 40s, have had a wide experience and are often powerful witnesses to their commitment to the goal of the Congregation of the Mission, following Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor. It is much more fruitful for all of them to spend their

limited time and energy with others who, like themselves, can profit from the program.

As for the future, we have scheduled sessions of the Ongoing Formation Program and the Vincentian Heritage Program through the year 2004. The upcoming General Assembly could give us further suggestions for improvements or changes. One of these might be a further broadening of the participants to include Vincentian laity and other members of different groups sharing in the Vincentian charism. In addition, I believe that the CIF program should have better communication with the editor of *Nuntia* to inform the entire Congregation, as well as others, of the work being done in Paris.

I thank you for your support of ongoing formation.

The Visitors' Conferences

by José María Nieto, C.M.

Secretary General

11.VI.2001

1. Introduction

I ask your pardon for my lack of knowledge. I admit honestly that I am not acquainted with the reality of the Visitors' Conferences and have prepared this talk rather quickly. I participated only once in the European Conference. The Assistants General and you Visitors are the ones who really know them. Anyway, I will attempt to do what the Preparatory Commission has asked of me.

I would like to present a short and partial report on the Conferences of Visitors. Surely each of you has more and greater detailed information than I. Therefore, I offer a short outline of the different Conferences of Visitors.

My sources of information are all public (CLAPVI bulletin, provincial bulletins and periodicals and a few reports edited by provincial secretaries for their own province members). Some "internal" reports were also available, which were sent to the Secretary General with information about different Visitors' meetings. Many published articles (especially from CLAPVI) have come to us also, which we will not resume for you. We have very little published data from other conferences. If anyone would like more information from these conferences you would do well to approach them personally.

2. "Synod" is the name of the Congregation. The Conferences of Visitors: expression of interprovincial collaboration

Our Constitutions and Statutes state nothing about the creation and organization of Visitors' Conferences.

The Constitutions say simply that the Congregation of the Mission is divided into provinces and vice-provinces by their own right (C 120-121).

The Constitutions say little about relations between provinces. N° 102: "The superior general, the center of unity and coordination of the provinces, should also be a source of

spiritual animation and apostolic activity." Mutual relationships between provinces has not been constitutionally established and is left to the discretion of the provinces themselves.

Nevertheless interprovincial collaboration is a reality which has been practiced for some time. I mention a few recent examples. A good number of provinces and vice-provinces have been started and developed thanks to the help of others. Interprovincial collaboration in the apostolic area, formation, economic help, are not new, but have existed in the Congregation for some time. We have heard of this in this very meeting. Also different Visitors in the same country or in neighboring countries have set up national or regional groups of collaboration over the past 25 years (U.S.A. 1973, Italy and Spain 1970, Southern Cone of Latin America, etc.).

The 1986 General Assembly document was "Unum corpus, unus Spiritus." It treated the theme of unity. This has been deepened and complemented by the document on "interprovincial relations."

The last two General Assemblies (1992 and 1998) studied interprovincial collaboration and have encouraged it. The final document of the 1998 General Assembly states: "The reflection of the 1992 General Assembly, which has animated our convictions and commitments for six years, has committed the entire Congregation to interprovincial collaboration" (GA 1998, With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the Threshold of the new Millennium. Introduction).

Visitors' Conferences are clear and important expressions of this interprovincial collaboration, of collaboration between confreres Visitors, and between members of provinces on the same continent. The Conferences have arisen fundamentally, not "from above," but "from the base." They arose out of necessity, the desire for mutual acquaintance, and from a common communitarian and apostolic problematic, from the need for reciprocal aid, from a search for more global and efficacious solutions.

Another element, begun "from above," has helped in the growth and development of the Conferences. General Assemblies and the international Visitors' Meetings have also furthered the climate for the birth of these Conferences. CLAPVI (1971) appeared shortly after the 1968-1969 General Assembly and in response to its own needs. CEVIM (Europe) was conceived in the international meeting of Visitors in Rio de Janeiro (1989). In 1994, perhaps responding to the 1992 General Assembly, APVC and CEVIM started. The Superior General, writing to the Conferences of Visitors (April 1999), placed significant challenges before each Conference.

The fact that we live in a more interconnected world, more communicative and "reunited," has been a motivating force for our own "intercommunication" within the Congregation.

Finally, the reality and experience of a "Synodal" Church and the existence of national and continental bishops' conferences, as well as conferences of religious, I believe has been a more or less implicit factor in the appearance of our own Visitors' Conferences. "Synod is the name of the Church," said an ancient Christian author. We can say in the same way: "Synod (walking together) is the name of the Congregation of the Mission."

In other words, our Visitors' Conferences are a "Synodal" expression of the Congregation, an important expression of interprovincial collaboration.

3. Chart indicating the Conferences of Visitors (later on, I will comment on the chart, except on the sections: Activities and Projects)

	APVC	CEVIM	COVIAM	CLAPVI	CUSAV
Name	Asian Pacific Visitors Conference	Conférence Européenne Visiteurs C.M.	Conférence des Visiteurs en Afrique et Madagascar	Conferencia Latinoamericana Provincias Vicentinas	Conference of U.S.A. Visitors
Region	Asie, Pacific, Oceania	Europe, Middle East	Africa, Madagascar	Latin America	United States
Place / year Fondation	Sydney (Australia), April 1994	Paris, 1990	Kinshasa (Congo), June 1994	Santandercito (Colombia), September 1971	1973
Statutes	Sydney, 1994	Graz (Austria), 1991	Kinshasa, 1994	Rules: Colombia, 1971 Stat.: Funza, 1983	2000
N° Provinces	6	20	6	14	5
Provinces	Aul, Ids, InM, InS, Phi, Sin	Aus, SCM, Par, Tol, Ger, Hib, Bar, Cae, Mat, Sal, Hol, Hun, Nea, Rom, Tau, Lus, Pol, Slk, Sln, Ori	Aet, Cng, Mad, Moz, Nig, SJJ	Aeq, AmC, Arg, Chi, Col, Cos, Cub, Cur, Flu, For, Mex, Per, Por, Ven	Mer, Nan, Ocn, Occ, Orl

	APVC	CEVIM	COVIAM	CLAPVI	CUSAV
Publication				1. Magazone CLAPVI: # 107, September 1973 2. Bulletin "En contacto"	Conference News Newsletter (2000)
Principal Activities	1. Annual meeting 2. For. Formators: Philippines, 1996 Indonesia, 1998 Orissa (India), 2000	1. Annual meeting 2. Meeting Formators: Berceau, 2000.	1. Annual meeting 2. Formation Committee 3. Meeting Formators: Addis Ababa, 1997 Maputo, 1999 Nairobi, 2000	1. General Assemblies (10) 2. Renewal Courses (6) 3. Interprovincial Meeting (25) 4. Meeting Formators (3)	1. Restructuration of Provinces: August 1998 2. Meeting Visitors and Councils: April 2001
Projects	1. Vincentian Center (Adamson University, Philippines) 2. Asian Vicentian Forum		1. F. Formators: Kenya, 2001 2. Internal Sem.: Nigeria-Cameroon	1. Planning: 2000-2002	1. F. Formators (June 2001) 2. National Convocation (January 2002)

4. Common aspects of the Visitors' Conferences:

a) *Juridical Statute*

Each conference has a "Statute," a norm for its function, open to modification.

b) *Similar objectives*

We can list the following principal objectives of the Conferences:

- Mutual knowledge of the reality of the confreres.
- Interprovincial cooperation, collaboration, and fraternal assistance.
- Realization of common projects for the development of the mission.
- Promotion of initial and ongoing formation.
- Internal renewal of the Congregation of the Mission, its missionaries and works.
- Inculturation of the Vincentian charism.

c) *Principal activity*

Besides meetings, usually annual, of Visitors, up to the present, formation seems to be the chief concern of all the Conferences. All, in one way or another, promote initial, ongoing, and especially, apostolic formation. The ultimate concern is for the formation of formators.

5. Initiatives: most important achievements of the Conferences:

CLAPVI

- Publication of the Bulletin: *Revista CLAPVI*. One of the most important publications of the Congregation. It first appeared in 1973, and since then has published over 100 issues (No. 107 is on the way). It contains information from all CLAPVI meetings. There is also the *En Contacto* Bulletin.
- Since 1981, CLAPVI has held ten General Assemblies; between 1974 and 1979, six courses on "Vincentian Spiritual Renewal"; and more than 25 Interprovincial Meetings, open to the Daughters of Charity and lay Vincentians, on many different themes.
- CLAPVI has an extensive program of activities for 2000-2002, notably meetings of formators. Also: Educational Pastoral (April 2000), Pastoral for Indians (November 2000), Parish Mission Pastoral (October 2001), Service to the Clergy (April 2002), Meeting on Popular Missions (November 2002).

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- "La CLAPVI, para qué?" Its paper on the 1980 General Assembly, in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 27, abril-junio 1980, 93-100.
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- "Breve Historia de CLAPVI" in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 93, octubre-diciembre 1996, 357-366.
- "Estatutos de CLAPVI 1999" in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 193, julio-diciembre 1999, 126-135.
- "La revista 'CLAPVI' en sus primeros cien números" in *Boletín CLAPVI*, n° 100-101, septiembre 1998 - febrero 1999, 87-105.

APCV (Asia-Pacific)

- Already realized: three meetings of formators (cf. the summary chart), lasting two weeks every 18 months.
- Worthy of note for the newness, two projects for the future.
- A Vincentian Center at Adamson University (Manila): a center for service to the Vincentian Mission in Asia Pacific. At its commencement stress will be placed on Vincentian material resources and on service to the members of the provinces.
- Asian Vincentian Forum. To promote an annual meeting of Vincentian themes, open to all members of the Vincentian Family. Its objective: to help people reflect on the Vincentian charism in an Asian context.

CUSAV (United States)

- The "Reconfiguration" process of the United States Provinces is of interest not only to the United States, but to the rest of the Congregation. This process and its results are a reality which may well take place within a few years in other provinces.
- Two projects are underway: Formators (2001) and the National Convention (January 2002) on "Vincentian Evangelization in North America."

COVIAM (Africa)

- I apologize for this Africa report, since it is the region I am least acquainted with. The six African provinces operate in special situations: they are young, in continual growth, in permanently

difficult circumstances (poverty, hunger, war, etc.). They all have good numbers of "foreign" confreres. Many problems arise from these facts. It seems to me that COVIAM has two fundamental tasks: the solid Vincentian formation of the confreres and inculturation in our charism. The next Internal Seminary course will include Nigeria and Cameroon. They have in existence for several years a Formation Committee.

CEVIM (Europe)

- The fall of the Berlin Wall, the widening of the European Union, the growing number of immigrants are indications of the new face of old Europe. As I see it, CEVIM has not accomplished anything very great. Nevertheless, in spite of many different languages and the aging of the provinces, CEVIM is faced with the fascinating job of reinventing-refounding the Congregation on the European soil where it was born 400 years ago.

6. Unity and inculturation of our charism

Conferences of Visitors are a way of promoting and constructing the "continental unity" of the Congregation. We are used to thinking of unity in "universal" terms, like "the unity of the whole Congregation." "Continental unity," we could say, is "intermediate." However, today it is very useful, and doubtlessly will further global unity.

In a complementary way, Visitors' Conferences are a means of promoting "diversity" in inculturating our charism. The Congregation, following Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, is called on to incarnate this charism in different cultures and situations. The Superior General has recently written about the "Five Faces of Jesus Christ" and the "Five Faces of Mary." The Visitors' Conferences now have the important task of constructing the "five faces of the Congregation": the five (possibly more on some continents) inculturations of the Vincentian charism.

I take this opportunity, the first time I have been with all of you together, to let you know that I am at your disposition, and that of your provinces, for anything I can do for you as Secretary General. Also, I thank you, in my own name and in that of all who work in the secretariat, for your collaboration with us, begging at the same time your continued and so necessary cooperation. Thank you very much.

(JOHN KENNEDY, C.M., translator)

Reorganization of Provinces

by Thomas McKenna, C.M.

Visitor of USA-East
15.VI.2001

My task is to share some thoughts on a particular issue in the overall theme of interprovincial collaboration, the reorganization of Provinces. I would like to do that by first talking about the idea itself, secondly by describing the pursuit of that possibility which is currently underway among the five Provinces in the United States, and thirdly by giving you some of my own reflections from my experience as Visitor of one of the US Provinces.

The Idea

The idea of reorganization is simple enough. It centers around this question: would it be a worthwhile thing to combine or split provinces into some new configuration? I will address myself only to the first possibility since combining is the experience from which I speak. Joining entities represents perhaps the ultimate step in interprovincial collaboration: provinces melding their individual selves to form a brand new entity — and a new identity. Because both the possibilities and the costs of such “ultimate collaboration” are substantial, it is a step which requires clear analysis, disinterested (“holy indifferent”) thinking, and most particularly, building a wide consensus.

What would motivate provinces to consider such a ground-shaking step?

On one end of the spectrum is simple survival. A province could get to a point of threatened viability. It could shrink so much numerically and its personnel get so elderly that it could no longer sustain its vital elements; e.g., leadership pool, a real prospect of new members, ability to staff its major works, financial independence, and other marks of continuing life. It just cannot survive without linking up with another province.

At the other end of the motivation spectrum is improved mission; that is, the prospect of doing the Congregation's mission more effectively in a given region. A particular province could carry

on its governance and works into the foreseeable future, even with somewhat diminished numbers. But for a number of reasons, joining with neighboring provinces holds out the prospect of giving better gospel service in a certain territory. This province can survive on its own and perhaps even prosper. But the question arises: Could it make more of an evangelizing impact if it combined forces with one or more surrounding provinces?

My reading in the US is that we find ourselves at different places along this spectrum, with no one province being a pure instance of either side. All of us are diminishing in numbers and rising in median age (as with most all USA Congregations). To a greater or lesser extent, all can continue for the immediate future. But some are closer than others to the viability point and this puts us at slightly different psychological starting points. There was an acknowledgement of this at our recent meetings of all the councils. Be that as it may, mission enters into the deliberations of every one of the five provinces — and in fact our discussions have kept returning to this master notion. As we reach for the deeper motivation for *why* reconfiguration would be worth the considerable efforts and indeed pain involved in a move of this size, we find ourselves grappling with the very reasons we as a Community are in existence in the first place. Will such a move let us do our fundamental mission better? I will have more to say on this all-important point at the end of the talk.

Toward the Reconfiguration of the United States Provinces

In a discussion among the five provincials at their 1997 meeting, the question of reorganization came to the table. In the years immediately preceding there had been talks between individual provinces about joining together, but no decision had been made. The provincials now thought there were growing reasons for looking at the issue on a national scale, mainly because of the desire to carry out our mission more effectively in the US and also the nationwide fall-off in religious vocations. Consequently, they asked the Superior General (attending the meeting) to compose a kind of mandate for them to investigate possibilities.

In a letter written on 19 November 1997, Fr. Maloney asked them “to pursue the goal of uniting the provinces.” The shape of such a configuration, in his words “will depend largely on your analysis of your concrete situation and on your creativity in envisioning possible forms of unified government.” Pursuing this question rested on a projection about the Congregation’s future in the US and how the best works there could be sustained and strengthened as numbers diminish. Fr. Maloney said he had offered similar thoughts about the need for consolidating resources in several other countries where the

Congregation serves. Finally, he shared his judgment that even though the actual outcomes cannot be proved ahead of time, that "in these circumstances, common government and planning will enable us to mobilize our personnel better, to organize a unified program of formation, to conserve on the number of people involved in provincial administration, and to use our financial resources more effectively."

With this in hand, the provincials appointed a five-man committee and charged it to: 1) gather and share information about the provinces, 2) research similar efforts already made by other US Congregations, and 3) recommend ways of engaging the confreres of all five provinces in the discussion. Taking the lead from Fr. Maloney's suggestion to be creative in envisioning possible forms of unified government, the hard-working committee decided on a "models" approach to stimulate the dialogue. In addition they retained a consultant, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate who had been at the center of this Congregation's planning as they combined their five US provinces into one.

In consultation with the confreres, they drew up different scenarios of how reconfiguration might happen, which included geography, leadership structures, numbers, formation concerns and collaborative mechanisms. Then, with the Visitors' input, they circulated five of these "tentative models" among the nearly 500 members of the five provinces. One key strategy of this stage was to hold "town meetings" in 12 different regions across the country which members of the committee ran and then reported on to the Visitors. Even though the data was plentiful and a challenge to synthesize, the committee presented useful recommendations.

The next step was to arrive at more "firm" models which would provide the basis of discussion for eventual gatherings of each of the provinces. An important part of this stage was a meeting of all five Provincial Councils to air opinions and listen to one another. From the beginning many confreres had insisted that for any successful rearrangement, it would be essential for the members of the provinces to get to know one another better. Only in this personal, face-to-face setting would the natural resistances to change have the chance to soften. (To this end, the first US national Vincentian convocation is now being organized for this coming January. Its topic is evangelization in North America.)

This week here in Dublin, the Visitors of the US provinces have decided on the final proposals to be sent out as the framework for the country-wide discussion to be held during this coming fall. Not final answers to the question, they are models of what could be, which are meant to elicit the confreres' best thinking about the pros and cons of reconfiguration. The results of all the deliberations — individuals,

provinces, Reconfiguration Committee members, councils, and provincials — will be sent to the Superior General early next year. As we know, by our Constitutions any decision about realigning Provinces is in his hands.

Some Reflections

I have left out a number of details, but can respond if anyone is interested in further information about how we proceeded. My intention now is to offer a few reflections on what has happened so far or, in more personal terms, “what I learned on my trip along the road to Reconfiguration!”

1. Mission as Central

As I mentioned earlier, the idea of mission has come to predominate our deliberations. It was right there in the beginning intuitions, was the center of Fr. Maloney’s reasons for encouraging the discussion, and has reappeared in force at the end as we are forced to weigh the concrete benefits of reorganization against the costs of actually doing it. There was much energy spent along the way in considering the how of reconfiguration (models, governance possibilities, time tables, etc.), and that was necessary because people wanted to know as concretely as possible **what** it was we were deciding on. But as we approach the time of making a recommendation, the **why** of it, the motivation for doing it in the first place, moves more to center stage.

In a general sense, our mission is clear. It is right there in the beginning of the Constitutions: “to follow Christ evangelizing the poor” (C 1). “... we are called by God to evangelize the poor” (cf. C 10). But when the concept of mission gets more particular, in what I will call its operational sense, roads can begin to diverge. That is to say, when faced with concrete decisions — about common life, prayer practices and especially about apostolic works — there can be a big difference in the way provinces interpret mission. For instance, in one province, *its* understanding of mission operates to have it withdraw from a certain work, put more money and personnel into another, or begin a certain new one. But another province, because of *its* other “operational appreciation” of the meaning of mission, would come down in a quite different place on its apostolic decisions. Not that this is necessarily or even always the case, but looking at a given province from the point of view of the criteria by which it actually makes its decisions can reveal considerable dissimilarity in spirit and outlook between two provinces who follow the very same general mission.

My point is that even though there can be strong agreement that the fundamental reason for reorganization is more effective mission, there are different "operational understandings" of what mission entails. Using the same words does not always translate into the same practical meanings. Pulling off a successful reorganization entails building those shared meanings, hammering out roughly equivalent criteria for making important apostolic, community life and governance decisions.

2. Surfacing the Losses and Fears

It did not come as a surprise to read in the testimonies of other communities that resistances to reorganization are considerable. The prospect of reconfiguration raises not only hopes, but also apprehensions. One might even talk about a subterranean discussion that goes on, a parallel and often hidden conversation about the losses people fear will happen. And even though things like control, long-time traditions, and self-determination figure in here, I agree with those who say the most basic of the possible losses is identity.

A person's sense of himself comes in no small measure from his sense of how he fits into the group to which he is closely related. For instance, I get many of my basic bearings from my position in the family — uncle, brother, son; unifier, polarizer, reconciler, rebel or outcast; wisdom figure, family clown, eccentric, one who gives shelter or one who needs it. I come to know how I "fit in," and this inner map helps to firm up my psychic place-to-stand in life.

A confrere gets many of his bearings from how he fits inside a province. The group has a shape, a cast of interrelated characters, a pecking order, an imaginative grid on which a man places himself. When this shape is called into question, so are the identities of those who make it up. When the province speaks of dissolving and then reemerging in some new form (configuration), it jolts the familiar places in the world its members have taken for granted all along. I heard a man ask explicitly, "in this new reconfiguration, who will I be?"

An added dimension of this are the fears which can surface in provinces which are considerably smaller than the ones with which they might join. Will we be absorbed and taken over by the larger group which will impose its spirit, its culture on us? Again, a threat of loss of identity.

It is the opinion of a number of North American confreres that so far we have been only partially successful in bringing such fears to the general table. Other lesser suspicions stemming from past strains in relationships between different provinces are also at work.

Undoubtedly they would be better dealt with if they were openly acknowledged and somehow discussed. I hope we will be able to do this in the months ahead.

3. Keeping the Discussion on Point

Perhaps it is the strength of the resistances which underlies this next phenomenon, but it has struck me how difficult it sometimes has been to keep the purpose of the reconfiguration discussions in mind. It can easily slip to the side.

For one thing, the ultimate decision is not up to the provinces but rather to the Superior General. While this is not in dispute constitutionally, there is a way in which the opposite presumption slips into the deliberations and one proceeds as if the vote on a given model will decide the issue once and for all. I am sure the Superior General will want to take into account the numerical weight of the positions argued for. But it is also my understanding that the cogency of those arguments will count at least as much when he and his council enter into their discussion.

In an intervention at the joint council meeting, a confrere with a background in law commented that what was needed to be presented to the Superior General was a kind of "brief" setting out the case for and against a particular position on reconfiguration. His remark struck me because it focused on the nature of our discussions as an attempt to explain to (perhaps persuade?) another the compelling reasons for any such move.

Secondly, the precise thing to be explained also has a way of slipping off center. The question again? How will this reorganization make us more responsive to the evangelizing needs of the poor in this region of the world? In what ways and under what respects will it let us do the mission better than we are doing it now? The more clearly the discussions are directed to this underlying point, the more the chance of "making the case" for change.

And so, the Committee and the Visitors have decided to be as specific and concrete as possible in the way that question is put to the confreres. Not simply, "how will this arrangement allow us to do the mission more effectively?", but more pointedly:

- how will it let us **deploy our personnel** better (strengthening certain works, de-emphasizing others, initiating new ones)?
- how will it help in **economizing** on the number of confreres in internal **administration**?
- how will it let us mount higher quality **formation and ongoing formation** programs?

- how will it help us use our **money** more efficiently?
- how will it encourage us **to spread the practices** in our **most effective** ministries to other parts of the province?
- how will it make us more attractive for **vocations**?
- how will it increase the chances of enhancing our **communal and prayer life**?
- how will it encourage us to look in fresh ways at our presence in the US?

My point? A key task is to keep the purpose focused and not let it get blurred by secondary, though interesting, issues. The whole reconfiguration question has struck me as a kind of corporate Rorschach test. It holds up a blurry image of what might be and evokes from the confreres a wealth of hopes, fears, creative ideas, suspicions, and desires. Just because of the range of those feelings and thoughts, I think it is doubly important to bring clarity and discipline to the discussion and try our best to keep it on line.

Conclusion

From the perspective of someone presently involved in the issue, I have offered you more reflections on combining provinces. I spoke of the general idea, the process which we in the USA have been using, and gave a few of my impressions of how things have gone.

I could have developed other points: things such as the increasing body of literature that has been coming out in the US from other Congregations who undertook this task, the concern and skills for building consensus, the climate among the confreres (at least of my province) as they address the issue in earnest, the interesting reasons why the US Provinces were divided originally, the imaginative governance, apostolate and geographic structures suggested, the challenge for the provincials to work more closely than they had before, the strong desire for more collaboration between the provinces despite the eventual outcome, the frequent mention (and fear) of different "cultures" in each of the provinces, the vocational possibilities, the concerns for finances and care of the elderly in a new set-up, and so on. But that is for future discussion.

Homily of the Superior General for the Closing of the Visitors' Meeting

Readings: James 5:9-12; Matthew 5:33-37

We all need a guiding star in life. As St. Vincent grew older, more and more that star became simplicity. "It is the virtue I love most," he stated. "It is my gospel." Simplicity is love of the truth, even passion for it. "I am the way and the truth and the life," Jesus says. "No one comes to the Father except through me" — through the Truth. "Those who act in the truth, walk in the light," Jesus declares. "The truth will set you free," he assures his followers.

So I encourage you today, in the footsteps of St. Vincent, make truth your guiding star as Visitors.

The saying of Jesus in today's first reading appears in three different places in the New Testament (Jas 5:12; Mt 5:37; 2 Cor 1:18-19), so it must have been very important for the early Christian community. Jesus states: "Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no."

As we conclude this meeting, let me reflect with you for a few moments on this wonderful saying of the Lord. What is its meaning for us, who exercise the service of authority in the Congregation?

1. Jesus is saying to us first of all, "Speak clearly and simply." Do so humbly and with great charity, but speak the truth. Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no. I encourage you to do this as Visitors. Speak simply with your brothers in community, with the poor, with your own spiritual director. My experience is that at times many of us are afraid to express our own truth. We hesitate to talk about our sexuality and celibacy, our struggles, our hopes, our fears, our dreams, our weaknesses. Jesus calls us today to speak clearly and simply. I know, of course, that that is difficult, but it is one of the great challenges that faces those in authority today. Can we create a communal environment, an ecosystem in which we consistently speak the truth with love?

2. Jesus is also encouraging us to witness to the truth. He is saying: "Let your life match your words." "Let your Vincentian charism shine out through your life." "Let the truth set you free." encourage you today to call the confreres to witness to the truth that is at the heart of our missionary vocation as Vincentians.
 - Call them to go wherever in the world the needs of the poor are crying out, rather than hold on tightly to the security of a place or a job that they like or even the friends or people who appreciate them so much.
 - Call them to live with one another in community as friends who really love each other.
 - Call them to share their own material possessions with the poor and to stand with them in their struggle for justice.
 - Call them to witness to forms of love that are more lasting than sexual union, rather than to focus on sexual relations as if they were the only way of loving.
 - Call them to discern the will of God with their brothers, to listen well, rather than to dominate or claim a personal monopoly in knowing God's will.
 - Call them to renounce immediate gratification for the sake of more important communal goals, rather than seek solely what is pleasing in the here and now.
 - Call them to spend time genuinely in prayer rather than to feel they must always be "doing something."

In other words, call them to be authentic. Let our words and our life be one as Vincentians.

3. Jesus encourages us, finally, to practice the truth. He says to us: "Do the works of justice and of love." In the context of Matthew's gospel, what "practicing the truth" means is clear. It means living in solidarity with the poor, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, searching for the causes of their poverty and trying to eradicate them through educational programs, health care programs, human development programs. It means sharing God's word with them and celebrating his Eucharistic presence. And today, when there is so much violence, it means being a peacemaker and teaching others to be peacemakers too. "Do the works of justice and peace," Jesus says to us. Let the works of justice and charity shine out in your province.

So, my brothers, the Lord lays out before us today this challenging saying: "Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no." Speak the truth. Witness to it. Practice it. Live it in community. If the truth shines out from our local communities, then our words will be

good news, our lives will be good news, our works will be good news. How I want to encourage you in this today! Animate our local communities to love the truth deeply, to live it authentically, and to make it real in works. Then our communities will be a sign in the world that Jesus is really alive among us.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

16.VI.2001

Meeting of the Visitors: “Animation of the Local Communities”

All Hallows College - Dublin, 4-16 June 2001

Proposals

At the conclusion of the first week of the meeting, the Visitors, guided by their conversations and shared experiences, formulated by groups a few proposals intended to facilitate the service of the Visitors as animators of their local communities.

These proposals were synthesized by the group secretaries of the nine work groups and presented to the entire group.

1. It seems to be necessary to clarify what the Congregation of the Mission understands today by **community life**: what is the end of our community (we are not only priests like diocesan priests). The Superior General could offer some reflections and orientations for the entire Congregation.
2. As to the possibility of editing a *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*, the main proposals of the groups have been:
 - That a Guide for the Local Superior, patterned after the Guide for the Visitor, be drawn up.
 - That this Guide consist of two parts: the first on the duties and rights of the local superior; the second on spiritual, missionary, and apostolic animation.
 - That it be not exactly a Guide, but rather some orienting criteria touching on the diversity of communities in the Congregation.
 - That it not be a book, but a formation handbook which could help all the members of the Congregation, not just the superiors.
 - That a Committee be formed to do the job.
 - That it be proposed by the Superior General, but adapted concretely in each province.
 - That the Visitors and provinces each edit a possible Guide for the Local Superior, and that the Superior General

extract their common elements for presentation to the entire Congregation.

3. The groups have insisted on the importance of **formation** of those who enter the Community as well as of the local superiors.

- To progressively instruct our younger members on the values of community life (some of these come to us thinking about becoming priests or missionaries, but have difficulty in adapting to community life, many of them coming from families of only one or two children).
- To take care in the preparation and celebration of provincial meetings on the formation of local superiors.
- To promote meetings for the formation of superiors on an interprovincial level.
- To make formation for community life a topic in every community meeting.
- To encourage sharing of experiences of community life of the provinces that they may serve as orientation for others, utilizing *Vincentiana* or other means of information.
- That the Superior General animate our communities by means of letters or reflections based on the realities of each community.

4. About the **Community Project** the groups proposed:

- Work so that the Community Project will be accepted by all missionaries and communities as a necessary instrument for community life.
- In communities and provinces where Community Projects are being elaborated to take care that they do not remain only written, but be lived.
- That the Community Project be related to the Provincial Project and that the Visitor see to it that the communities work every year on one of the objectives of the Provincial Project.
- That the Provincial Project offer clear criteria for drawing up Community Projects.
- That each community be asked to send the Visitor a report on the evaluation of the Community Project.
- That each province technically train people who can help the communities draw up their Community Project.
- That each province teach its younger members from the beginning of their formation about the dynamics of a Community Project.

- That *Vincentiana* publish some Community Projects that could serve as models for other communities; and that Community Projects be shared on a regional level.
 - One group proposes that the Community Project be drawn up for three years, with periodical evaluations.
5. Some Visitors and groups of Visitors expressed their **concrete commitment** to the proposals of this meeting:
- The Visitors of the U.S., from provinces in the process of reconfiguration, will directly check on the life of each one of their communities during the coming year.
 - A group of Visitors will begin the animation of its communities by taking into account the criteria shared during this meeting.
 - Another group of Visitors plans to visit its local communities more frequently.

Dublin, 9.VI.2001

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for the Advisors
of the Vincentian Family**

Paris, 7-26 July 2002

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